

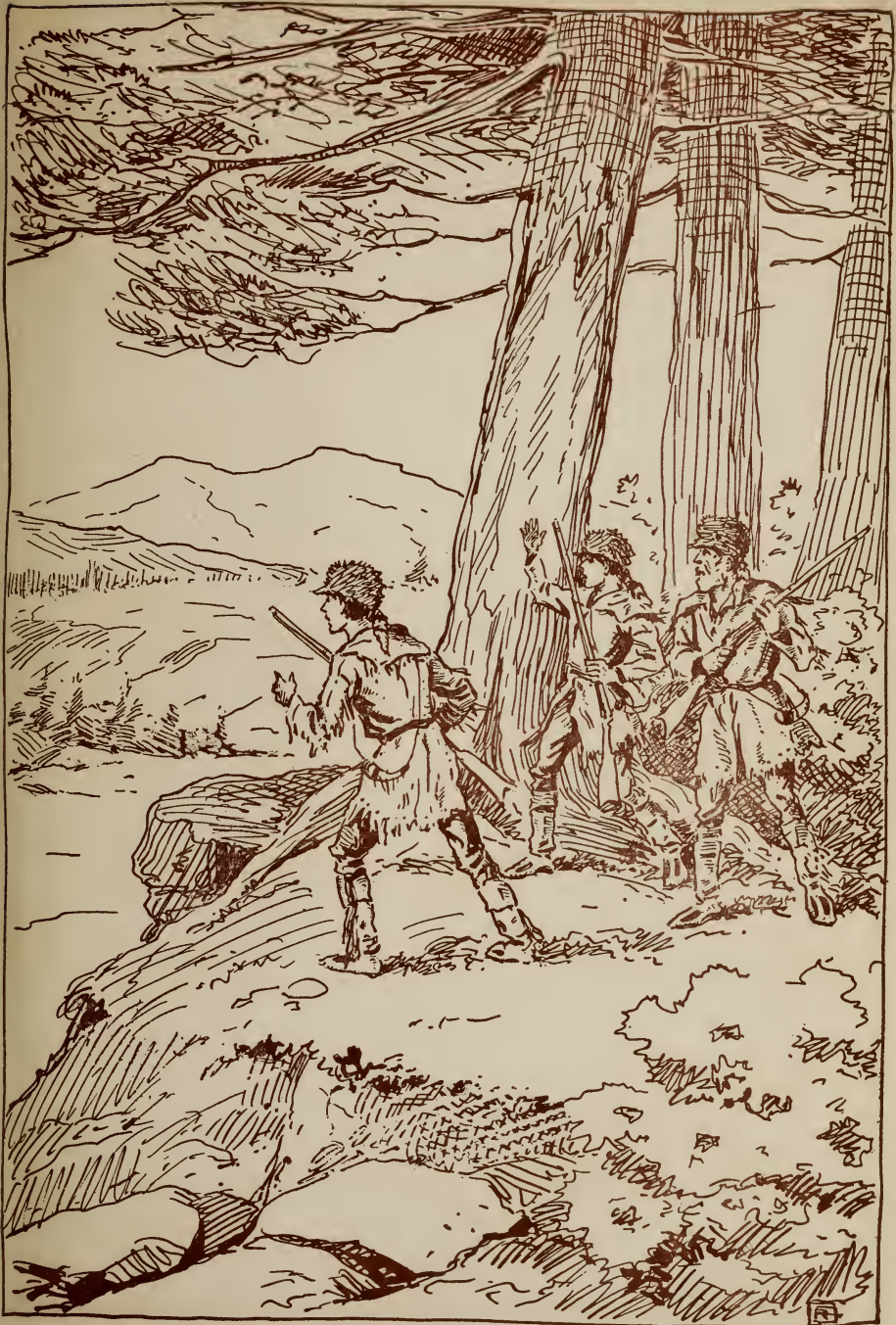
The PIONEER BOYS *of* THE YELLOWSTONE



HARRISON ADAMS

THE YOUNG PIONEER SERIES





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THE PIONEER BOYS OF THE YELLOWSTONE



OR: LOST IN THE LAND OF WONDERS

THE YOUNG PIONEER SERIES

BY HARRISON ADAMS

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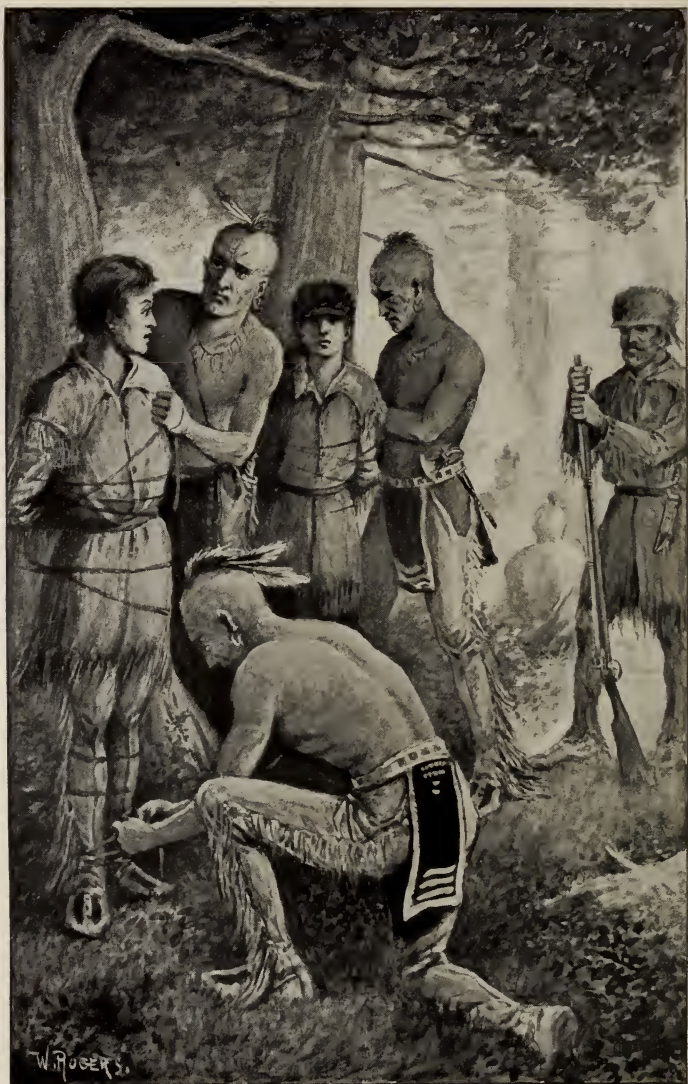
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From

Laura Pinger -



"SOME OF THE BRAVES STARTED TO FASTEN THE PRISONERS
TO TWO TREES" (See page 219)

The Young Pioneer Series

THE PIONEER BOYS OF THE YELLOWSTONE

OR: LOST IN THE LAND OF WONDERS

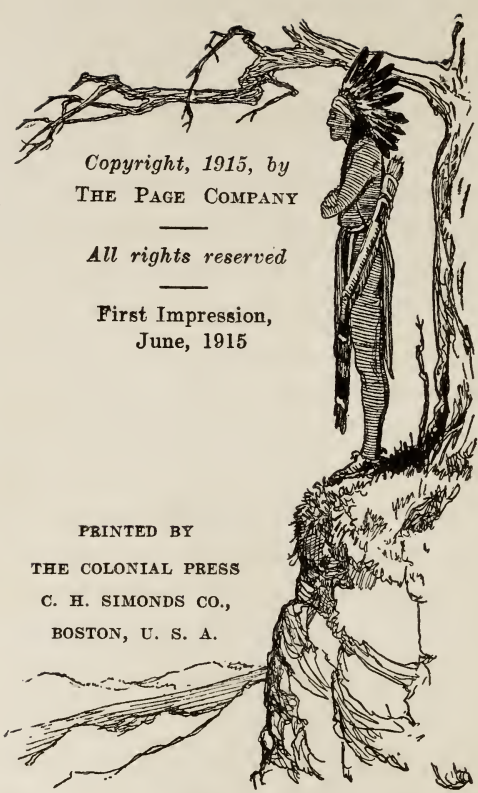
By HARRISON ADAMS

Author of "The Pioneer Boys of the Ohio," "The Pioneer Boys on the Great Lakes," "The Pioneer Boys of the Mississippi," "The Pioneer Boys of the Missouri," etc.



Illustrated by
WALTER S. ROGERS

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PREFACE

DEAR BOYS:—

In my last story, the title of which was “The Pioneer Boys of Missouri,” I half-promised that later on I might continue the recital of Dick and Roger Armstrong’s fortunes, and carry them further along their pathway toward the far-distant Pacific. The opportunity to redeem that promise having been given to me, I gladly meet you once more in these pages; and I trust this story will afford you quite as much pleasure in the reading as I have taken in the writing.

It will be remembered that we left the two pioneer lads in the winter camp of the Lewis and Clark exploring party. This company had been sent out, chiefly through the personal influence of the President at Washington, to find a way across the newly-acquired country, and blaze a path to the Pacific. They had gone into camp close to the quaint Mandan Indian village, far up on the Yellowstone River, which stream

they had been following since leaving the Missouri.

Apparently their troubles and difficulties had all been smoothed away, and there seemed to be clear sailing ahead for Dick and his cousin. They anticipated spending the long winter months in various ways—studying Indian character and habits, doing more or less hunting and trapping, and possibly learning if there could be any real truth in the strange stories they had heard from numerous sources concerning a Land of Enchantment that existed near the “Big Water” at the source of the river of the yellow rocks and the troubled current.

Unexpected developments, it chanced, caused the boys to venture into this unknown and mysterious region, where they met with many adventures which I have endeavored to narrate in this volume. It will be seen that, although the various tribes of Indians inhabiting the Great Northwest country at that time undoubtedly knew of the marvels embraced in what is now Yellowstone Park, a superstitious feeling of awe for the Evil Spirit’s workings made their visits to that region few and far between, though their love for the chase did take them there at times.

I trust that if any of you ever get a chance

to visit this National Reservation you will do so. And if you read the history of Yellowstone Park you will find that perhaps the first authentic account of its astonishing wonders was given to the world by a member of the Lewis and Clark expedition.

HARRISON ADAMS.

April 1, 1915.







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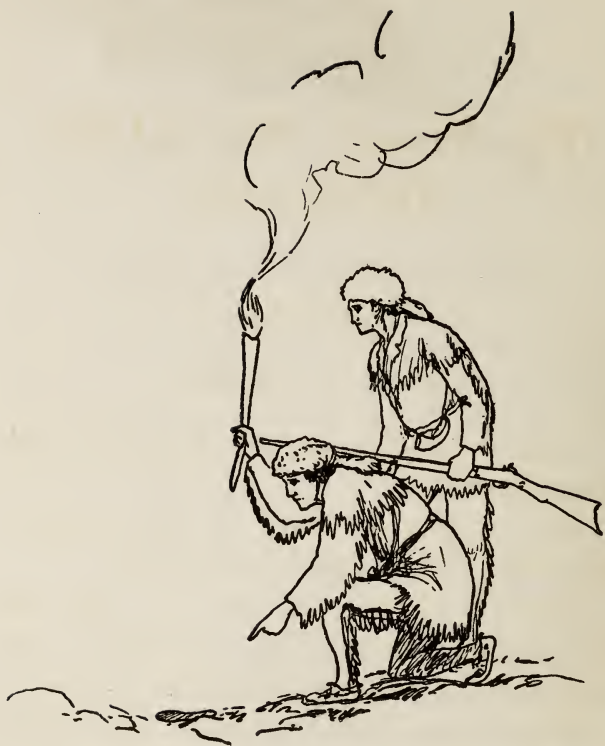
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The Pioneer Boys of the Yellowstone

CHAPTER I

THE YOUNG EXPLORERS

“I THINK we have gone far enough from the camp, Roger.”

“Just as you say, Dick. I never seem to know when to stop, once I get started.”

“And it’s easy to start you, too. That was why the boys, back at the settlement of St. Louis, came to call you ‘Headstrong Roger.’ ”

“Well, Dick, I hope to outgrow that fault in time. You know my father was the same way, when he and Uncle Bob used to hunt and trap and fish on the Ohio River, and later along the Mississippi.”

“It seems hard to believe, Roger, that we are so far from our homes. Sometimes I shut my eyes and can picture all the dear ones again—

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father, mother, and my younger brother, Sam."

"Yes, but here we are, hundreds and hundreds of miles from them, and in the heart of the Western wilderness," said the boy who had been called Roger; "and planning to spend the coming winter with our good friends Captain Lewis and Captain Clark."

"Sometimes," remarked his companion, "I am sorry we determined to stay here and winter near the Mandan Indian village. We might have turned back and gone home, along with the messengers who were dispatched with documents for the President at Washington."

"And who also carried the precious paper that Jasper Williams signed, which will save our parents' homes from being taken away from them by that scheming French trader, Lascelles."

"And yet," observed Dick, thoughtfully, "when I think of the wonderful things we have seen, and what a glorious chance we have of setting eyes on the great Pacific Ocean next summer, I am glad we decided to stay up here on this strange river of the wilderness that in the Indian tongue means Yellowstone."

"It is a different stream from the 'Big

Muddy' or the Missouri, and as full of rapids as it can be. Before long the expedition will have to abandon all boats, and trust to the horses to carry the camp outfit over the mountains to the west."

"Listen, Roger, what was that sound?"

"I thought it was the whinny of a horse," replied the impetuous one of the pair, as they dropped behind some brush that grew on the brow of a gradual slope leading to a lower level.

"And it came from below us, too. What could a horse be doing here? Do you think any of our men are out after fresh meat to-day?"

"There are a few horses among some of the Indian tribes around here, and it might be—there, look, something is coming yonder, Dick!"

"Don't move again, Roger; it is an Indian brave, and there follows another, treading in his trail."

"They are not of our friends, the Mandans, Dick, and they don't look like the Sioux we met a while ago. There come three more, and now I can see the horse!"

"H'sh! Not a whisper now, and lie as still as a rock. They have sharp eyes, even if they are not on the warpath."

Roger knew why his cousin made this last re-

mark, for the horse was dragging two poles after him, the ends of which trailed on the ground. Upon this primitive wagon rested quite a pile of stuff, evidently the skin teepee of the family and other articles, as well as a buxom squaw and a small papoose.

Back of the first horse came a second, similarly equipped, and then another tall, half-naked brave, armed with bow and arrows. Dick knew that the little procession was a portion of some Indian community moving their camp to a place where the game would be more abundant, for this was the season when they laid in their winter store of jerked venison or "pemmican."

"Don't move yet, Roger," whispered Dick, after the last figure had gone some little distance along the trail; "I believe there is another party coming. Yes, I can already see them a little way back there. Just crouch down and watch."

While the two boys are lying hidden, and waiting for the passage of the hostile Indians, belonging to some tribe with which they hitherto had had no dealings, we might take advantage of the opportunity to ascertain just who Dick and Roger Armstrong are, and what

they could be doing in this unknown region, far back in 1804, when the headwaters of the Missouri had never been fully explored by any white man.

Many years previous to this time their grandfather, David Armstrong, had emigrated from Virginia to the banks of the Ohio, being tempted to take this step because of wonderful stories concerning that country told to him by his good friend, the famous pioneer, Daniel Boone.

His family consisted of three children, a girl and two boys, Bob and Sandy. The brothers grew up versed in woods lore, as did all border boys. They knew all about the secrets of the great forest and the mighty waters. And, indeed, in those days, with peril constantly hovering over their heads, it was essential that boys should learn how to handle a rifle as soon as they could lift one of the long-barreled weapons to their shoulder.¹

Later, the pioneer was tempted to continue still further into the Golden West, always with the rainbow of promise luring him onward toward the setting sun. With other families, the Armstrongs drifted down the beautiful Ohio,

¹ See "The Pioneer Boys of the Ohio."

and finally settled on the Missouri, above the trading post of St. Louis.

Here the two sturdy lads grew to manhood, married, and built cabins of their own, near that of old David and his wife. To Bob came two boys, Dick and Sam; while his brother had a son, Roger, and a sweet girl named Mary, after her grandmother.

These two cousins, Dick and Roger, hunted in company, and were as fond of one another as their fathers had been. Dick was a little the older, and acted as a sort of safety valve upon the more impulsive Roger; but both learned the lessons of Nature, day by day, until, at the time we make their acquaintance in this volume, they were capable of meeting the craftiness of the Indian, or the fury of the forest wild beast, with equal cunning.

On the previous spring there had fallen a bombshell into the happy homes of the Armstrongs near the thriving settlement named after the French king. When David, on his arrival years before, had purchased a large section of land that was bound to grow very valuable for his heirs in later years, he had believed his title to be clear and unquestioned.

Later, it turned out that a certain signature

was lacking to make the title valid, and unless this could be obtained within a certain time from an heir of the original owners, the entire tract would be taken from them. An unscrupulous French trader, named François Lascelles, had secured the opposing claim, and threatened to evict the Armstrongs in the coming spring, unless they could produce that valuable signature.

This impending family trouble affected Dick and Roger greatly. They began to make investigations and learned that the man whose signature was wanted, Jasper Williams by name, a hunter and trapper, was then far away in the unknown regions of the West.

They also learned that this forest ranger expected to join an exploring party headed by two men who had recently been in St. Louis, and whom they had met in company with their grandfather, David Armstrong. These were Captain Lewis and Captain Clark, sent out by the President of the United States to learn what lay far beyond the Mississippi Valley, and possibly to proceed all the way to the Pacific Ocean, which was known to lie hundreds, perhaps thousands of miles west of the Mississippi Valley. (Note 1.) ¹

¹ The notes will be found at the end of the book.

So, determined to do everything in their power to get that paper signed by the one man whose name would save their homes, Dick and Roger had finally gained the consent of their parents to their making the perilous trip.

Many weary weeks the boys followed after the expedition, which had had quite a start ahead of them. They met with strange vicissitudes and wonderful adventures by the way, yet through it all their courage and grim determination carried them safely, so that in the end they finally reached the little company of bold spirits forging ahead through this unknown land.¹

They were received with kindness by the two captains, who admired the spirit that had brought these lads through so many difficulties.

In the end the valuable signature was attached to the paper, which was placed in charge of a special messenger whom Captain Lewis was sending, with two other men, to carry reports of the progress of the expedition to the President, who had great faith in the enterprise.

This messenger had instructions to proceed straight to St. Louis, first of all, and deliver the document to David Armstrong before heading for Washington.

¹ See "The Pioneer Boys of the Missouri."

The boys had yielded to the invitation of their new friends to remain with the expedition in camp through the approaching winter, and continue on in the spring to the great ocean that all believed lay beyond the mountain barrier. Such a chance would never come to them again in all their lives. The document would reach the hands of the home folks in due time, and also the letters they had dispatched with it.

And so it is that we find Dick and Roger off on a little exploring trip on a day when the chill winds told of the winter that was soon to wrap all the land in an icy mantle.

They huddled there in security behind the thick brush, and, by peeping through little openings, could watch all that went on below them. The moving Indians interested them greatly, because they apparently belonged to a tribe with which the boys, until then, had had no intercourse; although Dick guessed, from the style of head-dress of the warriors, that in all probability they were Blackfeet, and not Crows.

At any rate, he did not like their looks, and felt that it would be a serious thing for himself and his companion if by any accident they attracted the attention of the passing party. Even if they were not just then on the warpath,

they possessed arms, and might consider a white intruder on their hunting grounds as a bitter enemy, who should be exterminated at any cost.

The second detachment had now come along and was passing by. It consisted of several braves, and another horse dragging the poles upon which a squaw and three dark-faced Indian papooses sat amidst the camp equipage.

Suddenly Roger, in his eagerness to see a little better, when something especially attracted his attention, chanced to make a hasty move, with the result that he dislodged quite a good-sized stone, which started down the slope, gathering speed as it went.

CHAPTER II

SAVED BY A JACK-RABBIT

AT first, the stone seemed satisfied to merely slide downward, so that Dick hoped it would lodge in some crevice and not be noticed by any of the passing Indians. This hope was short-lived, however, for, gaining momentum as the slope grew steeper, the stone began to skip and jump, until, bursting through a little patch of dead grass, it attracted the attention of the nearest brave.

Dick heard him utter a guttural exclamation, and, at the same time saw him hastily reach for his bow, which was slung over his shoulder. The others, too, manifested immediate interest in the bounding stone, for such things do not roll down a slope without some cause and there were red enemies of their tribe who often lay in hiding to attack them.

Roger gave a gasp of dismay. That was not the first time he had been guilty of bringing some sort of trouble upon the heads of himself and his cousin. Dick laid his hand on the arm

of the impetuous one, and his low-whispered "Be still" doubtless prevented Roger from making matters worse by showing himself above the bush that sheltered them.

It would seem as though some good cherub aloft must have interposed to save the two lads from the peril which confronted them. Even as they lay there and stared, they saw one of the Indians point at something a little further along the slope, and then, strange to say, the procession again resumed its forward movement, as though all suspicion had been allayed.

Roger was almost bursting with curiosity to know what had intervened. He had not been able to see, because Dick chanced to be on that side of him and, much as he wanted to stretch his neck and look, he dared not attempt it after what had happened.

Accordingly they lay perfectly still until the last of the Indians had disappeared in the distance. Even then Dick would not start to leave their hiding place until absolutely sure no others were coming along the trail.

Unable to longer restrain the overpowering curiosity that gripped him, Roger presently put the question that was burning on his tongue.

"What was it happened to make them pass

by, and not start up here to see how that stone started to roll down?" he asked.

"Then you didn't see the jack-rabbit, Roger?"

"A rabbit, you say, Dick?"

"Yes. It was the most fortunate thing that could have happened for us, and we ought to be thankful to the little beast that he took it in his head to skip out when that stone jumped through the patch of dead grass where he was hiding."

"Oh! was that what happened?" exclaimed the other boy, chuckling now because of the lucky event. "And, of course, when the Indians saw the rabbit running off, they believed it had started the stone to falling. It sometimes seems to me as if we were guarded by some invisible power, we have so many wonderful escapes!"

"It may be that we are, Roger, because we know that not a day passes but that our mothers, far away down the Missouri, are praying that we may be spared to come back to them. But, now that the coast is clear, let us head once more for Fort Mandan, as we call our camp."

Of course both these wide-awake lads knew how to find their way through the densest woods, or over unknown ground, by using their knowledge of woodcraft to tell them the cardinal points of the compass.

When the sky was clear, they could find the north by means of the sun, moon, or some of the stars. If clouds obscured their vision, they knew how to discover the same fact through the moss on the trees, or even the thickness of the bark. Besides the methods mentioned, there were others that experience and association with other rovers of the woods had taught them.

Consequently, although they might be traversing country that neither of them had ever set eyes on before, they always knew just which way to head in order to reach camp.

Dick was constantly taking mental notes as he went along. These included not only the prospects for game, but the lay of the land, for Captain Lewis wished to know all that was possible about such things before once more starting out in the spring to complete his great trip to the Western Sea.

At the same time, Dick was also on the alert for every sign of danger, from whatever source. His keen vision took in all that went on around him. Not a leaf rustled to the ground, as some passing breeze loosened its hold on the branch above, but he saw it eddying through the air; never a little ground squirrel frisked behind

some lichen-covered rock, or tree root, that Dick did not instantly note.

They presently found themselves traversing what seemed to be a rough belt of rocky land, where the trees were not very plentiful. It was even difficult at times to advance, and they had to be careful where they placed their feet, since a fall might result in serious bruises.

Just as they passed around a huge boulder, that had at some time fallen from the face of the cliff towering above them, the two boys heard a queer, sniffing sound. Before either had time to draw back, there came shuffling into view, not more than fifty feet beyond them, a terrifying figure such as they had never up to that moment set eyes upon.

It was a huge bear, far larger than any they had met with in all their hunting trips along the Missouri. From some of the hunters connected with the exploring party they had heard the wildest stories concerning a monster species of brown, or grizzly bear that was said to have its home amidst the rocky dens of the mountains and foothills lying to the west. The Indians always spoke of this animal as though it were to be dreaded more than any creature of the wilds. The brave who could produce the long claws of a

grizzly bear was immediately honored with the head feathers of a chief.

Dick knew, therefore, that they were now facing one of these terrible animals. He could well understand the awe with which they were viewed by the red men, and the half-breed trappers, for the appearance of this monster was certainly alarming. Perhaps, if left to his own device, the more cautious Dick might have considered it best for them to decline a combat and, if the bear did not attack them, they could withdraw and seek a safer trail across the rocky ridge.

In figuring on this course, however, he failed to count on the impetuous nature of his companion. The hunter-instinct was well developed in Roger. He looked upon nearly everything that walked on four feet and carried a coat of fur as his legitimate prize, if only he could succeed in placing a bullet where it would do the most good.

So it came about that, as Dick started to put out his hand with the intention of drawing his comrade back, he was startled to hear the crash of a gun close to his ear. Roger had instinctively thrown his weapon to his shoulder, and, with quick aim, pulled the trigger.

Under ordinary conditions Roger was a very

clever marksman. There were times, however, when he failed to exercise the proper care, and then he was apt to make a poor shot. That may have happened in the present instance; or else, it must be true, as the Indians said, that the grizzly bear could carry off more lead, or survive more arrows, than any other living creature.

Dick was shocked to see that, instead of falling over as the shot rang out, the great bear started toward them, roaring, and acting as though rendered furious by the wound he had received.

There was nothing for it but that Dick should try to complete the tragedy. He aimed as best he could, considering the fact that the animal was now moving swiftly, if clumsily, in their direction, and pulled the trigger.

His rifle was always kept well primed and the powder did not simply flash in the pan; but he realized at once that he had not given the monster his death wound, for the bear still advanced, displaying all the symptoms of rage.

“We must get out of this, Roger!” cried Dick, for, as it would be utterly impossible for either of them to reload in time to meet the oncoming beast, they must either escape, or else engage in

a terrible fight with their knives at close quarters.

The remembrance of the long, sharp claws he had seen around the neck of the Sioux chief, Running Elk, caused Dick to decide on the former course. As he turned to run, he dragged Roger with him.

He remembered hearing that these terrible denizens of the Western mountains could not climb a tree like their black cousins. To this fact many a man owed his life, when attacked by a grizzly bear. As he ran, Dick strained his eyes to discover a convenient tree into which he and Roger might climb to safety.

Glancing back over his shoulder when a chance occurred, he saw, to his dismay, that the wounded animal was coming after them with a rush, and evidently had no idea of giving over the pursuit simply because his two-legged enemies were retreating.

“What can we do, Dick?” gasped Roger, now beginning to realize the foolishness of taking that haphazard shot at such a terrible beast, against which he had been warned by others who knew something of its ferocity.

“We must climb a tree, it is our only hope!” replied the other, between his set teeth.

“There’s one just ahead of us, Dick!” cried Roger, hopefully.

“We could never get up before the bear caught us, for there are no limbs low enough to be easily reached,” Dick answered. “A little further on I think I can see the one we must gain. Try to run faster; he is gaining on us, I’m afraid!”

Both lads were soon breathing heavily, for they found the uneven nature of the rock-strewn ground to be very much against them. But, fortunately, neither chanced to fall, and thus delay their flight and, while the oncoming grizzly was yet some little distance in their wake, they managed to reach the hospitable tree that offered them hope of a refuge.

“Up as fast as you can, Roger!” urged Dick.

Roger would not have stirred an inch, only he saw that his cousin was already clambering as fast as he could go. Impulsive, headstrong and even careless Roger might be at times, but he was no coward, and he would not climb to safety, leaving his chum to face any peril from which he was freed.

They managed to get fairly well lodged in the bare branches of the mountain oak before the

pursuing animal arrived. The bear stood up on his hind legs and tried to reach their dangling moccasin-covered feet, meanwhile snarling savagely, and manifesting the most determined desire to avenge his injuries.

“At any rate,” said Roger, “we both hit him, Dick, for you can see he is bleeding from two wounds. Oh! why did I let my gun fall when I stumbled that time? If I had it here with me now I could soon fix that fellow!”

“Then you must leave that to me this time, Roger,” remarked the other, who had managed to slip the strap of his gun over his shoulder as he drew near the tree, so as to have both hands free for climbing—and he had certainly needed them, too.

Dick now began to load his gun, meanwhile watching the actions of the furious bear. The grizzly was trying to gain lodgment among the lower limbs of the tree that had offered the fugitives an asylum; but he did not seem to know how to go about it, or to utilize those long, sharp claws that had been given to him by Nature more as a means of offense than for climbing purposes.

Several times he fell back heavily, only to give vent to his ferocity in sullen roars. Finally

Dick, having sent the patched bullet home with his ramrod, began to prime the pan of his long gun, so as to be ready to make use of the weapon.

CHAPTER III

THE TERROR OF THE MOUNTAINS

“MAKE sure work of him, Dick!” Roger said, in trembling tones, as he saw the other draw back the flint-capped hammer of his gun, showing that it was ready for business.

The grizzly was still displaying all the signs of furious anger, and there seemed some danger that he might manage to gain lodgment among the lower limbs of the tree.

“No hurry, Roger! And, another thing, I’ve concluded that, since you brought this trouble on our heads by that unlucky shot, you should be the one to finish our enemy, not me!”

“Oh, Dick, do you really mean it?” cried Roger, filled with delight. “I’ve been saying over and over again that some day I hoped to be able to kill one of these monsters that the Indians fear so much. Do you intend to lend me your gun, and let me finish him?”

“If you’ll promise to keep cool, and watch for your chance to make the bullet tell. We haven’t



"HIS TREMBLING FINGER SUDDENLY PRESSED THE TRIGGER"

so many of them along with us that we can afford to waste even a single one."

"I give that promise willingly," said the other, as he stretched out his hand for the gun.

Having it in his possession, Roger's first move was to lower himself a little. He meant to further excite the beast, and cause him to remain upright until the gun, being brought to bear on his head, within a foot or so of the small, gleaming eyes, could be fired with full effect.

"Careful not to go too far, Roger; he is waiting to make another try for you!" warned the watchful Dick.

So the young marksman paused, and, settling himself firmly in a crotch of the tree, bent forward. The gun was held at an acute angle, and the tiny sight near the terminus of the long, shining barrel could be seen against the dark fur of the bear.

When the beast opened his mouth to give utterance to another roar, Roger knew his time had come. His trembling finger suddenly pressed the trigger, there was a loud report, a still louder roar, and then a scuffling sound.

"He's down!" yelled Roger, in anticipated triumph.

"Give me the gun, so that I may reload it!"

the other boy called, meanwhile observing the significant actions of the grizzly with mingled curiosity and satisfaction.

The animal had fallen over, and seemed to be struggling desperately to get up again on all fours. But that last leaden missile must have reached a vital part, for, as the seconds passed, these efforts became more and more feeble until, just as Dick primed his weapon again, there was a last spasmodic movement. Then the huge animal remained motionless.

Roger sprang down from his perch, in his usual reckless fashion; but there was no longer any danger, for the bear was dead. The boy placed his right foot on the huge bulk, and waved his hat in triumph; for, after all is said and done, he was but a lad, and this marked the highest point in his career as a hunter of big game.

"They'll never believe it, Dick," he exclaimed, "unless we carry back something to prove our story. And that means we've got to slice off these claws to show. After this we can have necklaces made of them, and the Indians will look on us as mighty hunters."

"Just as you say, Roger, and, if you start with that one, I'll attend to the other fore paw.

They are enough to give you a cold shiver. How our mothers would turn pale if they saw them, and knew what a narrow escape we had.”

“Yes, but our fathers would pat us on the back, Dick, and say that we were ‘chips of the old block,’ because they many times took their lives in their hands the same way, when founding their homes on the frontier, and know what it is to face the perils of the hunting trail.”

Dick kept on the alert while engaged in his task of severing the claws of the dead bear. After having seen those strange Indians passing, not so very long ago, he realized that there was always more or less danger of others being in the neighborhood. And those three loud reports, as the guns were fired, would carry a long distance, telling the natives that white men were around.

Nothing occurred, however, to give them further alarm, and presently, the claws having been obtained, the two boys continued on their way toward the distant camp.

It was at least two hours later that they sighted the Mandan village, near which the camp of the exploring expedition had been pitched.

Knowing that, any day now, winter, while somewhat delayed, might break upon them, Cap-

tains Lewis and Clark were preparing for a long stay here, and their hunters were laying in a supply of fresh venison to be made into pemmican. (Note 2.)

When the two boys reached the camp, bearing the terrible claws of a grizzly, their arrival caused a great sensation. Roger did not spare himself in relating the story, for he knew his own failings; but, since it had come out well, he received nothing but congratulations.

The old forest ranger, Jasper Williams, lingered after the others had gone, and Dick saw that he had some sort of communication to make. The boys had managed to save Jasper's life when they were all prisoners of the warlike Sioux, and, ever since, the trapper had felt a great interest in the cousins.¹

"I'm going off with two companions on a short trip," he now told the boys. "We may be gone a week, or even two, for we wish to investigate the truth concerning some stories that have come to us concerning a wonderful valley among the mountains, where all sorts of strange animals abound, even to goats that leap off the loftiest crags, and striking on their curved horns, rebound safely. It is even possible that,

¹ See "The Pioneer Boys of the Missouri:"

if we find the stories true, we may spend most of the winter there trapping and hunting.”

The boys were sorry to learn this, for they were fond of Jasper and had hoped to see much of him during the long winter.

“We start in an hour, so as to get to a certain point by sundown,” the ranger told them further. “You see, the winter has been holding back so long now that it is apt to start in any time with a furious storm, and the sooner we get to where we are going the better. The snow falls very deep in the mountains, and there are avalanches that bury everything under them forty feet deep.”

It was in the heart of Roger to hint that they would be delighted to accompany the ranger; but a look from Dick caused him to bite his tongue and refrain. Afterwards, when they had seen the three men start forth, and cheered them on their way, Dick consented to explain his reasons for motioning to his cousin to say nothing about going along.

“We can’t expect to be in everything, you see, Roger,” he said. “After all, we are only boys, and some of the men here still look on us as inferior to them in ability to accomplish things, because they are so much stouter and stronger.

We can find plenty to occupy our minds and hands while they are gone. Perhaps, who knows? should they come back, one of the men may not want to return with Jasper, and that would be our chance to try for an invitation."

"I suppose you're right, Dick," grumbled Roger. "You nearly always hit the nail on the head. But it would have been a fine trip for us. And, now that I've met with and killed one of these terrible grizzly bears we've heard such tales about, I'm burning with eagerness to shoot one of the strange mountain goats Jasper was telling about, that have such immense, curved horns."

"Plenty of time for all that, Roger," the other told him. "The whole winter is before us, and when spring comes, as we head further into the West we will have to cross many mountain chains before we see the ocean. Among them we will surely come across numbers of these queer goats, as well as elk, buffalo and antelope."

So Roger finally became reconciled to what could not be changed. There was really no occasion for his feeling that way long, because Dick busied himself in mapping out new ventures every night, as they sat before the camp-

fire, with hands twined about their knees, and talked of home, and what wonderful sights they had looked upon since leaving the settlement of St. Louis.

Two days thus passed, and the boys were looking forward to doing further roaming, if the weather permitted, on the following morning. The afternoon was drawing to a close, and in the west the sun sank toward his bed among the far distant mountain peaks, while the heavens began to take on a glorious hue.

The camp of the explorers was a bustling scene at such an hour, for preparations were under way for the evening meal, the fires burned cheerily, and it was almost time for the guard to be changed.

Being under strict military rule, the members of the expedition day and night pursued their vocations with the same care as though they really anticipated an attack from some unseen enemy. Guards were posted at night, and no one was allowed to enter or leave the camp without giving the countersign.

This was done partly because Captain Lewis and Captain Clark believed in discipline, one of them having been brought up in the little army of the new republic. There was also another

reason for keeping a constant watch. There had been a number of French half-breeds in this region before their arrival, and these men, who had been reaping a rich reward trading with the various tribes of Indians, viewed the coming of the Americans with great disfavor, believing it might bring their harvest to an untimely end.

Rumors had reached the ears of the commanders of the little force that some of these men were trying to excite the Sioux to take up the buried hatchet, and proceed in force against the Mandans and their new white allies.

On this account, then, it was necessary that the camp be guarded against a sudden surprise. At least, if trouble came the explorers did not mean to be caught napping by the cunning red-men.

“You don’t think it feels much like snow, do you, Dick?” Roger asked, as they stood looking around them, with the sun commencing to drop down behind the horizon.

“The signs do not show it,” the other told him; “but you know they sometimes tell us wrong. The season is so late, now, that we’re liable to get a heavy storm any day and, as it’s growing colder all the time, it will come as snow and not rain. Once it falls, the Indians say we

will not see the bare ground soon again. But what are the men running to the other side of the camp for, do you suppose?"

"Listen, one of them just shouted that a man was coming, mounted on a horse," said Roger.

"That sounds as though it might be a white man," added Dick, as they hastened through the camp toward the other side where they might see for themselves what all the commotion meant. "Horses are not common in this country. We are running short ourselves, since we've had some stolen by prowling Indians, two died, and the three men who started down the river took as many more with them."

By this time they had arrived at a point where they could look toward the southeast, for it was to that quarter the attention of the members of the expedition seemed to be directed.

Dick uttered an exclamation that was echoed by his cousin. Their faces expressed the utmost dismay and alarm and there was good reason for this, as the cry that broke from Roger's lips indicated.

"Oh! Dick, what can it mean? There is the messenger who carried away our precious paper, coming back to camp on a worn-out horse. Something terrible must have happened!"

CHAPTER IV

BAD NEWS

"I'M afraid you are right, Roger," Dick replied, as the two pioneer boys hastened to be among the first to meet the rider when he came jogging into camp.

That something had, indeed, happened was easy to see from the dejected manner of the messenger. His face bore a deeply chagrined look, as though there was some reason for his feeling ashamed.

He had evidently pushed his horse hard all day, for the animal was worn out, and reeking with sweat, despite the fact that there was a decided chill in the air.

The man dropped wearily from his hard saddle. He came very near falling, for, after sitting in that constrained attitude for many hours, his lower limbs were benumbed, so that for a brief time he did not have the full use of them.

By this time Captain Lewis had heard the

clamor, and come out of his tent to ascertain what had happened.

Possibly he may have supposed that it was only a visit from some of the Mandans on an errand connected with their now friendly association with the whites. Then again, the commander may have wondered whether one of the hunting parties had arrived with some unusual species of game, such as none of the explorers had ever seen before.

When, after striding forward to join the crowd, he saw the dusty messenger, a frown came upon his ordinarily pleasant face. Captain Lewis knew that something must have gone amiss, or the man who, with two companions, had started over the back trail several days before would not have returned to camp in this way.

"What does this mean, Mayhew?" he demanded, as he came up, the others parting to allow a free passage, though naturally the two boys stuck to their posts, because they had an especial interest in whatever story the returned messenger might be about to relate.

"Something has happened, Captain Lewis, I'm sorry to tell you, and not at all to my credit," replied the man, trying to calm himself,

though it was evident that he was laboring under great stress of emotion.

“Were you attacked on the way?” asked the President’s private secretary, who had been entrusted with most of the responsibility of the excursion, and therefore felt more keenly than any one else the possibility of failure.

He had taken great pains to keep a daily account of the trip up to that point, and this diary he had sent to the head of the Government in the care of the three men, one of whom now stood before him with dejected mien.

“We believed we had taken all ordinary precautions, Captain,” the messenger continued, making a brave effort to confess his fault as became a man; “but, in the darkness of the night, they crept upon us without any one being the wiser. My horse gave the alarm with a whinny, and, as I awoke, it was to find that the camp had been invaded by several enemies.”

“Could you not see whether they were Indians or otherwise?” asked the commander, as though a sudden suspicion had flashed through his brain.

“It was very dark, and our eyes were not of much use, sir,” the messenger told him in reply. “We purposely refrained from building

anything but a small cooking fire, and that was in a hole so its light might not betray us to any wandering Indians. But they were not red men who attacked us; of that I am assured."

"Why are you so certain of that?" inquired Captain Lewis.

"We were all struggling with the intruders, who had evidently thrown themselves upon us just as my horse gave the warning whinny," the messenger explained. "I am positive that my hands did not clutch the greased body of a red-skin, when I tried to throw him. Clothes he certainly wore, such as all frontiersmen do. I could feel the deerskin tunic, with its fringed edges. Besides, I tore a handful of his beard out in my struggles."

"No more proof is needed!" declared Captain Lewis. "They must have been some of the French half-breeds. But go on, Mayhew, have you other distressing news for us? What of your two companions; I hope they did not meet their fate there in the darkness?"

At that the man's face lighted up a trifle. He had told the worst, and the rest would come easier now.

"Oh, no, indeed, sir, none of us were badly injured, strange as it might appear," he hur-

riedly explained. "Bruised we certainly were, and greatly puzzled at both the attack and its sudden ending, that left us still alive; but we were at least thankful it had been no worse!"

"And then what did you do?" continued the leader of the expedition.

"We stood guard with our guns ready the remainder of the night, sir, but we were not again disturbed. It was toward morning that I made a sudden discovery, which is what has brought me back to the camp to report, while my two companions kept on with your documents intended for the President."

Captain Lewis drew a deep sigh of relief. That was the first intimation he had received that his precious communications had been saved.

"Then explain why you have returned, if the papers were saved!" he demanded, as though puzzled.

"You forget, sir, that I was entrusted with another paper, which you ordered me to personally hand to the grandfather of the two boys who joined us."

When Mayhew said this, Dick and Roger knew that a new trouble had descended upon their heads. He must have lost the paper in

some manner and yet neither of the lads was able to understand how it could have happened.

“Do you mean to say the paper they set such store on is missing?” Captain Lewis demanded.

“I had it securely hidden in a pocket inside my tunic, Captain,” replied the humbled messenger; “but, when I came to look for it, it could not be found. When morning came we spent a full hour scouring the vicinity, but it was useless. And there had not been a breath of wind to carry a paper away. It must have been taken from me while I was struggling with that unknown man.”

“This is indeed a strange story you bring back with you, Mayhew,” continued the leader of the expedition, looking keenly at the other, who met his inquiring glance as bravely as he could. “Stop and consider, did you hear anything said that might give the slightest clue concerning the identity of the thieves?”

“But one word, sir, and that was a name,” came the ready answer. “The man with whom I was grappling, as we rolled over and over on the ground, suddenly let out a loud cry. I plainly heard him say the one word ‘Alexis!’ And then he suddenly threw me aside, for he was very powerful.”

“And did the fighting cease immediately?” asked Captain Lewis, quickly.

“Yes, sir, the others seemed to take that word as a signal, for the next thing I knew my companions were calling out to ascertain whether I had been seriously hurt. I found that they also had been bruised, and one had a knife wound in the arm, but not of a serious nature.”

The captain turned toward Dick and Roger.

“You have heard what Mayhew says, my boys,” he remarked. “Does it afford you any sort of clue as to the meaning of this mysterious attack in the dark, and the seizure of the paper you were sending home?”

“I am afraid it does, Captain,” Dick replied.

“You recognize the name, then, do you?”

“It is that of the grown son of François Lascelles,” replied Dick; “the rascally French trader who has bought up the claim against our parents’ holdings down near the settlement of St. Louis.”

“Then it is possible that they followed you all the way up here, and, having obtained the assistance of some equally desperate border characters, laid a cunning plot whereby they meant to win by foul means, where fair could not suc-

ceed! What puzzles me most of all is how they could know that Mayhew carried the paper. I should dislike very much to believe we had a traitor in our little camp!"

The captain looked around at the assembled men with a serious expression on his face, which caused some uneasiness among the soldiers, frontiersmen and voyageurs who made up the expedition. They had always shown themselves loyal to their commanders and, when the finger of suspicion pointed their way, all felt the disgrace keenly.

Mayhew it was who came to their relief.

"I could never believe, sir, that any one here could be so treacherous," he hastened to say, as though anxious to take the entire burden of responsibility on his own broad shoulders, in which he proved himself to be at least a man. "I have been seriously thinking it over as I rode all day long, and believe I can see how it may have been known that I carried the boys' packet."

"Then explain it, Mayhew; for I must confess that the whole thing is a great puzzle to me," Captain Lewis told him.

"When they saw us depart they knew, of course, that you would be sending a report of

the progress of the expedition to the Government at Washington, sir. They must have also surmised that the boys would have influenced Jasper Williams to sign the paper that would free their homes, and that one of us must be carrying it to St. Louis. Do you not think that is reasonable, Captain?"

"Yes, but tell me how they could have picked *you* out as the one bearing it?" asked the other, impatiently.

"The only explanation I can give is that they must have been in hiding near us at the time we camped," continued Mayhew. "I remember taking the packet out, so as to fasten it in my pocket anew, since it was not as secure as I desired. I believe some one was watching from the bushes near by, and saw me do it. Then, while we struggled there on the ground, he managed to tear open my tunic, and, while half-choking me, snatched the paper away."

"And giving a prearranged signal at the same time to tell of his success," remarked the captain, this time nodding his head in the affirmative, as though he had come around to the same way of thinking as Mayhew.

"The fighting ceased as if by magic," declared the messenger. "One minute all of us

were struggling as for our lives; then that cry rang out, and immediately we found ourselves deserted. We heard retreating footsteps, a harsh laugh, and shortly afterwards the distant hoofstrokes of horses being ridden rapidly away."

"And you slept no more, but stood on guard, not knowing but that the unseen and mysterious foes might return to finish their work?" suggested Captain Lewis.

"It was well on toward morning at the time, sir, for we had slept. I think they took a lesson from the redskins, who always make it a point to attack a camp just before the coming of dawn. They believe that men sleep heavier then than earlier in the night."

"You talked it over with the other men after the paper was missed, did you," continued the commander, "and decided that, while they continued on their long journey, it was your duty to return and report your loss?"

"I was broken-hearted over it, sir; but it was my duty. If I have been neglectful, I must stand the consequences. But we saw nothing suspicious, and did not dream of danger until it burst so suddenly upon us."

"I shall say nothing about that until I have

consulted with Captain Clark, who, you know, is the military leader of the expedition. Have your horse rubbed down, and secure food and refreshment for yourself, Mayhew. I must talk with these boys now."

CHAPTER V

READY FOR A FRESH START

TURNING to Dick and Roger, Captain Lewis told them to follow him to the shack where he and Captain Clark transacted whatever business they found necessary for the conduct of the expedition. It had been built so that the severe cold of winter might not interfere with their comfort and such was the success of the experiment that other cabins were even then in process of construction for the remaining members of the party.

Here they found the military head, busy with his charts. The leaders knew so little of the mysterious country which they were bent on exploring in the coming spring that notes were carefully kept of every scrap of information obtainable.

Often this consisted of fragmentary tales related by some wandering Indian concerning the strange things he had encountered far away toward the land of the setting sun. Allowances were made for the superstition of the natives

when a record was kept of these tales; but often there seemed a shred of truth behind it all which could be made to serve the purposes of the daring explorers.

So deeply interested was Captain Clark in some work on which he was engaged, and which seemed to be in the nature of making a new map of the country through which they had already passed, that he had actually paid no attention to all the shouting outside.

When his colleague came in, accompanied by the two boys, Captain Clark realized for the first time that something out of the ordinary must have happened.

He listened intently as the story of Mayhew's strange loss was unfolded, asked a number of questions that put him in possession of all the known facts, and then gave his conclusion.

"I am of the same opinion as the rest of you!" he declared. "It must have been the work of the men who would profit should that paper fail to reach the Armstrongs by spring; this French trader, François Lascelles, and his equally unscrupulous son, Alexis."

"But to think of them following us all the way to this point! It seems almost impossible," urged the other captain.

“Why should it be considered so?” asked the soldier, who appeared to grasp the salient points much easier than the President’s private secretary had done. “We have encountered no difficulties that a party of hardy voyageurs and trappers might not have overcome. Besides, it is quite possible that this same trader may have been in this country before now. The French were in possession of the great Mississippi Valley all the way down to the Gulf many years before it came into the hands of the United States Government. They must have had trading posts far to the west, and their half-breed trappers have taken beaver and all other fur-bearing animals from the streams of the Far Northwest.”

“You are right, Captain Clark,” said the other, warmly “and, after hearing your reasonable explanation, I can well believe that these men are no strangers to the region of the headwaters of the Missouri.”

“I also agree with Mayhew regarding the camp having been watched,” continued the soldier, gravely. “They suspected we would be sending back a report of our progress, and surmised also that these brave boys would either themselves carry their paper to their homes or

else give it into the keeping of our messengers. Just how they knew that Mayhew was carrying their document, and not either of the other messengers, I cannot say, but it seems that they managed to do so.”

He turned to Dick and his cousin to say:

“I am sorry indeed that this new trouble has befallen you, my lads, but throughout your long journey you have shown such fortitude, and such determination to succeed, that I feel sure you will not be downhearted now.”

“Thank you, sir,” replied Dick, for Roger could not say a word, since a lump in his throat seemed to be choking him. “We have been brought up by fathers who never knew what it was to despair. I was just wondering whether François Lascelles would immediately destroy that document, and then go on his way, resting under the belief that he had ruined all our work of months. He may have forgotten one thing, which is that Jasper Williams still lives, and can duplicate his signature, with both of you for witnesses.”

“Just what I was about to say,” declared the soldier, with a smile of satisfaction, “and it pleases me to know that you have hit upon the same idea. Yes, while this Lascelles may think

he has won his fight, the battle is never over until the last trump has sounded. When you again secure the signature you require, we will see to it that another messenger is dispatched to your home bearing it."

Roger managed to find his voice then.

"But how are we going to reach Jasper Williams," he asked, anxiously, "when he has gone off to find that wonderful valley where the game is so plentiful, but which the Indians are afraid to visit on account of the spirits that guard it?"

The two captains exchanged glances. They realized that difficulties indeed lay in the way of accomplishing the plan they had so cheerfully laid out.

"He may come back in a week or two, he told me," Dick explained, "and then again it is possible, if his companions agree, and the place suits them, that they may not return until late in the winter."

"And it would be too late then to get the paper to our people at home," sighed Roger, looking exceedingly downcast.

"I think I voice your sentiments as well as my own, Captain Clark," said the private secretary to the President, "when I make this suggestion. We can place one of our trusty hunters in charge

of these lads, and send them off to try to find Jasper Williams and his party, whose general direction we already know."

"I am of the same opinion, Captain," added the soldier, promptly, showing that he must have been thinking along similar lines. "Indeed, if an immediate start were made, they might even overtake the others on the way, for I do not fancy they will be in any great hurry, since they have orders to make notes of all they see by the way."

At hearing this Roger brightened up considerably. As usual, a way out began to appear when things had become almost as gloomy as seemed possible. As for Dick, he eagerly seized upon the chance to be doing something. Like most pioneer boys, these Armstrong lads had been brought up to strive to the utmost when there was anything worth while to be attained.

"Oh, thank you, Captain Clark, and you, too, Captain Lewis!" he hastened to say, "that is the kindest thing you could do for us. We will get ready to start in the morning and, if our old luck only holds out, we shall expect to come up with Jasper Williams inside of a few days."

"You will need a good trailer to assist you," remarked the soldier, "and among all our men I

do not know of any who is the equal of Mayhew if only you would not have any ill feeling toward him on account of what his carelessness has already cost you."

"Why, it was hardly his fault, that I can see, sir," declared Dick, "and I have always liked Benjamin Mayhew very much. If he cares to go with us, tell him we will be only too glad of his company."

"Yes," added Captain Lewis, who knew his men as few commanders might, "and this I am sure of—Mayhew will strive with might and main to retrieve himself. You will find that he has really taken his bad luck to heart. He will want to prove to us that he is capable. He will do wonders for you, lads, and I believe you show the part of wisdom in wishing him to accompany you."

"Then consider that settled," said the soldier. "I will have Mayhew in here presently, and talk with him. You can make your preparations for an early start in the morning."

"And both of us trust success will crown your gallant efforts to serve your loved ones at home," said Captain Lewis. "I well remember your fine old grandfather, David Armstrong. His name is familiar to all who know the history

of the early settlements along the Ohio, where such valiant pioneers as Daniel Boone, Simon Kenton and Colonel Harrod led the way into the wilderness, and lighted the torch of civilization."

It was very pleasant for the boys to know they had such strong friends in the leaders of the expedition making a track across the newly acquired possession of the young republic.

When they left the shack they somehow seemed to feel anything but downhearted. Indeed, with the buoyancy of youth they now faced the future hopefully, almost certain that they would quickly find Jasper Williams again, and bring him back to the camp, where he would make out and sign a new document, to be witnessed by both the captains, whose names were sure to carry weight in any court of law.

"It might be a great deal worse," admitted Roger, as he accompanied his cousin to their quarters in order to make what simple preparations they thought necessary for the early morning start.

"Many times so," Dick assured him. "Why, after all, this may turn out to be one of those blessings in disguise our mothers have so often told us about."

“You will have to explain that to me, Dick,” admitted the other boy, “for I own up that it is too much for my poor brain to understand.”

“Listen, then,” continued the other. “What if that scheming François Lascelles had delayed his attack on the messengers for days and even weeks, until they were almost at St. Louis, and then secured our paper? We would never have known about its loss, and could not send another!”

“That is so,” assented Roger, nodding his head as he managed to grasp the point his companion was making.

“Then again,” continued Dick, who could follow up an argument with the skill of a born lawyer, “suppose the three messengers had been killed in that night attack, we should not have known a thing about it. Our paper, as well as the valuable reports sent to the President, would have been lost.”

“Yes, and, Dick, we would have gone on enjoying ourselves all through the winter, never knowing that we had failed to save our homes.”

“As it is,” continued the other, “Lascelles, believing he has cut our claws, may take himself out of this section of country, so that another

messenger would have nothing to fear from him or his band."

"You are making me ready to believe that, after all, this may have been the best thing that could have happened," laughed Roger, as he began to examine his bullet-pouch to ascertain just how many leaden missiles it contained, and then pay the same attention to his powder-horn. For it was of the utmost consequence that in starting forth on this quest, that might consume not only days but weeks, they should be amply prepared for any difficulties that might arise to confront them.

That was destined to be a busy evening for the two lads. They molded bullets, replenished their stock of powder from the stores of the expedition, talked over matters with Mayhew, who seemed greatly pleased at the confidence they expressed in him, and even managed to lay out something of a chart for their guidance.

This map was made up of suggestions from Captain Clark, who had talked with Jasper Williams before the latter and his two companions left camp, and knew in a general way what direction they expected to take.

Before Dick and Roger allowed themselves to

think of sleep, they had everything arranged for the start in the morning. It was a great undertaking for two boys to think of venturing upon, but certainly not any more so than when they left their homes near St. Louis, and headed into the trackless West with the intention of overtaking the Lewis and Clark exploring expedition.

And both of them had faith to believe the same kind power that had watched over their destinies thus far would still continue to lead them by the hand.

CHAPTER VI

ON THE TRAIL TO THE BAD LANDS

WITH the first peep of dawn both lads were astir. Their hearts and thoughts were so wrapped up in the desire to once more find Jasper Williams and obtain his signature to a duplicate document, that, to tell the truth, neither had slept at all soundly.

As all preparations had been completed, there was little for them to do except get their breakfast, shoulder their packs, say good-by to the two leaders of the expedition, as well as the men, and start boldly forth.

Before the sun was half an hour above the horizon the little party of three had left the camp and the nearby Mandan village behind them, and were on their way.

It was known just where Williams and his companions expected to spend their first night, having started at noon, so none of them felt any necessity for trying to follow the trail until that point had been reached.

All through the morning they moved on, and

as noon approached drew near the place where the camp had been mapped out.

"That much is settled, Dick, you see!" ventured Roger, as he pointed to where the dead ashes of a fire were visible, there having been no high wind to blow them broadcast.

"Yes, they spent the first night here," admitted the other, "and so they must have just two and a half days the jump of us."

"That's a long start," grumbled Roger.

"Well, we expect to keep on the move each day longer than they will," explained the other. "Then again, they may find some place so much to their liking they would conclude to spend a couple of days there hunting or trapping. Jasper is always one to say a 'bird in the hand is worth two in the bush'; and those stories about the wonderful valley that is haunted by the spirits may turn out to be fairy tales after all."

"And now the real work begins, when we have to follow this trail," added Roger, who acted as though he did not want to lose a single minute.

"That is not going to be such a hard problem, I should think," Dick told him. "In the first place, they will not try to hide their trail

very much, because they do not expect hostile Indians to follow them; though at night, of course, they will take every precaution against a surprise. And then again, Roger, we know something about trailing, while Mayhew, here, has not his equal in our camp, so Captain Clark told me."

Mayhew did not hear this, for he was busy looking around the camp, examining the cold ashes, and in various ways picking up little details that an ordinary person would never have been able to discover.

"Unless—well, I might as well own up, Dick," said Roger. "I've been wondering whether after all that tricky Lascelles would be satisfied to go away from here after destroying our paper. He might know about Jasper Williams's trip to the Wonderland the Indians tell about, and try to capture him, so as to keep him from signing another paper for us."

Dick shook his head as though he did not believe such a thing could be possible.

"It *might* happen that way, Roger, but I feel pretty sure we're well rid of that rascal. Let us keep the one thing before us to find Jasper, and fetch him back to camp again in time to start afresh."

“There, Benjamin is beckoning to us, Dick; he is ready to start off,” and Roger eagerly obeyed the finger of the guide, for he was anxious to be on the move.

They did not even stop to make a fire and cook anything at noon, but munched some food that had been brought along with them. Roger begrudged even a ten-minute stop, when it was not absolutely necessary.

“We ought to keep on the move as long as daylight lasts,” he declared. “After it gets dark there’ll be plenty of time to rest, and do a little cooking. By then we might possibly be lucky enough to reach their second camping place.”

Time passed on, and constantly the little party pressed ahead. Just as had been hoped, Williams and his companions did not seem to care to hide their trail; though, when the chance offered, they always took a course that gave them an opportunity to walk on hard ground, or even rocks, which actions sprang from the natural caution of frontiersmen.

Slowly the sun sank toward the golden West. The boys surveyed a low-lying bank of somber gray clouds and wondered if the long delayed opening snow-storm of winter might spring

from that source. Roger as usual found cause for new anxiety in that possibility.

“If it does come down on us, you see, Dick,” he said, complainingly, “the first thing we’d lose the trail we’re following, and then we’d be in a nice pickle. What could we do if that happened?”

“Just as we did when following the explorers along the Missouri,” he was told. “Use our heads to figure things out and take chances. It has worked with us lots of times, and will again.”

“You mean we’ve got a general idea where that valley they are heading for lies, and might get there even without following their trail; is that it?”

“Yes, and to reach it we will have to pass through the country the Indians fear so much, so that, before we are through with this trip, we may know whether there is any truth in those strange tales or not.”

“They tell of a large and beautiful lake in which the river with the yellow stones along its bank has its source,” Roger went on, recalling all he had heard. “Then there are marvelous fountains that have spirit breath, the red men say, and spring up from holes in the

ground, to try to reach the skies. They tell of many colored stones, and mud as blue as the heavens; they say it is the home of the Evil Spirit, and that no one's life is safe who wanders that way, and passes a single night there."

"But you do not believe such silly stories, I hope?"

"Whether they are true or not, I am not prepared to say," replied the other, after a little pause; "but you ought to know me too well to think so ill of me as to believe that a hundred evil spirits would keep me from exploring that country of the big lake and the flowing fountains, and all the other strange things!"

So they talked as they moved along. Much of the labor of following the trail fell upon the shoulders of the frontiersman, Mayhew, who seemed only too glad to assume the responsibility. Not once did he lose the track. When it crossed a stony section he seemed to be able to decide just the point for which the others must have been making, and in all cases he quickly pointed out the tracks again where the soil became soft enough to allow of impressions.

They had seen considerable game while on

the way, though not stopping to obtain any fresh meat. All that could keep until they had overtaken those who were ahead. So, although Roger was greatly tempted when he discovered a trio of big elk feeding in a glade not a quarter of a mile to windward, he shut his teeth hard and told himself that on another day his chance would come.

Here were jack-rabbits in plenty, gophers whistled in the little open stretches, antelopes were seen feeding on the prairies that lay between the uplifts, while ducks and wild geese swam on the waters of small ponds, and might easily have been bagged had the boys cared to take the time.

Some of the rapid little streams they crossed looked as though they might be well stocked with splendid trout; indeed, they often saw fine gamy fellows dart out of sight beneath some overhanging bank. They loved to fish as well as any boys who ever lived; but just then felt it necessary to put the temptation behind them.

Once they even discovered a herd of buffalo not a great distance away.

“How I would like to creep up on them, and pick out a nice young bull to drop,” said Roger. Then he shook his head and heaved a sigh, for

there came before his mental vision the happy home so far away, over which such a dark shadow rested, and which could only be dissipated through the efforts of himself and his cousin.

“One thing we ought to remember with thankfulness,” remarked Dick, “and that is that so far we have seen not a single sign of Indians. The Mandans do not come this way very often, you know, and the Sioux are even more timid about venturing into the region of the Bad Lands; but there are other tribes who are not so fearful.”

“You mean the Blackfeet and the Crows,” Roger added; “both of them fierce fighters, and hating the whites like poison. I’m afraid we will see more or less of them before we get back to camp.”

“We have always been able to take care of ourselves in the past, remember, Roger, and can again. Here are three of us, well armed and determined. If the Indians try to do us injury they will find two can play at that game. Our fathers had to fight just the same kind of enemies away back there on the Ohio, and if we’re ‘chips of the old block,’ as they tell us, why shouldn’t we do as well? There, Ben-

jamin has discovered something, and wants to show us."

Mayhew showed the boys where Jasper and his two companions had dropped down behind some bushes, and crawled along for quite a distance.

"Here is where they stopped to raise their heads," explained the guide. "I think they must have discovered some enemies over in that direction, for they always kept peering out that way. See, here is where they even plucked some of the dead leaves from this bush to glue their eyes to the opening. It is an old hunter's trick for a moving branch might betray the one in hiding."

A short time afterwards Mayhew seemed pleased, for he announced another radical change in the trail he was following so carefully.

"The danger was passed successfully, you can see," he told the boys, "for here they arose to their feet again, and hurried on, perhaps bending low, because they were careful to keep behind these rocks. After this we may not find it so easy to follow the trail, for they have scented danger."

It turned out just as he said, and from that

time on it required the exercise of considerable woodcraft on the part of the frontiersman to enable him to detect the tracks of the three whom they were pursuing.

Now Jasper and his two friends had followed an outcropping stone ledge as far as they could, and swung across a patch of soft ground by means of a dangling wild grave-vine. Another time they had stepped upon an overturned tree, proceeded some distance along the trunk, and then made a great leap for some spot where soft-soled moccasins would leave but scant evidence of their passing.

But Mayhew was acquainted with all these methods of concealing a trail. He had spent much of his life in the wilderness, and knew Indian ways as well as any man Dick and Roger had ever met.

Gradually that long afternoon gave place to the coming of night. Shadows began to steal out from among the trees and stalk boldly. More and more difficult did it become for the trailer to see the faint tracks of those he was pursuing. Finally he came to a full stop.

"It is no use trying further, lads," Mayhew told them, "for there would be constant danger of losing the trail entirely. Unless we choose

to risk lighting torches, and keeping on, we must make camp here, cook something to eat, and then get what rest we may, looking to a new day and an early start."

Although Roger hated to give up, he knew there was nothing else to be done.

CHAPTER VII

THE STRANGE AWAKENING

THERE was little that the two lads did not know about making a camp, for they had been accustomed to spending nights in the woods ever since they first learned to handle a gun, and bring down the game so necessary for daily food.

The spot chosen by their guide for passing the night was as suitable as could be found at that late hour. Around them lay the woods, the trees tall and not of any generous girth, for the slopes of the hills bordering the Yellowstone are covered with a growth of pine that is not noted for its size.

When Mayhew tossed his pack aside the boys followed suit. They had made a long day of it, and were tired, though ready enough to keep moving could it be to their advantage.

The woodranger started to make his little cooking fire, while Dick and Roger arranged their blankets and made other preparations for the night. If they noticed the actions of the

guide at all it was with slight interest, for both were fully acquainted with the methods which he used in his work.

Like many other things copied from the Indians, this idea of a small blaze that could not betray their presence had become a part of every woodsman's education. The way in which it was done was very simple.

First a hole was scooped out of a place where there was something of a depression, and in this a small quantity of inflammable tinder was placed. Flint and steel, upon being brought violently together, produced the necessary spark, and the handful of fine wood took fire.

It was carefully guarded on all sides so that not a ray might escape to attract attention; and, when sufficient red coals had accumulated, what cooking was necessary could be carried on over them.

When properly done, this sort of fire might remain undetected twenty paces away by the possessor of the keenest vision. Only the presence of suspicious odors, such as of burning wood, or food cooking, might betray the fact that there was a fire in the vicinity.

All Mayhew wanted was to heat some water, and make a pot of tea, of which he was very

fond, although it was a great luxury of that early day. The supper itself would have to be eaten just as it was. They had a fair amount of bread, such as was baked by the camp cook; plenty of pemmican, and that was about all. If the food supply ran short they must depend wholly on what game they could bring down with their rifles.

Most boys of to-day would view such a limited bill of fare with alarm, and think starvation was staring them in the face. These lads of the frontier, however, were accustomed to privations. They faced empty larders every time stormy weather prevented hunting. And early in life they learned that it does no good to borrow trouble.

The night closed in around them. Dick and his cousin lay in their blankets and conversed in whispers, while Mayhew continued to busy himself over his tiny fire.

Around them lay the wilderness that was almost unknown to the foot of white man, yet it did not seem to awe these adventurous souls, simply because they had been brought up in the school of experience, and were familiar with nearly all the ordinary features of a vast solitude.

When the guide had his pannikin of tea ready he told the boys to fall to, and, being sharp pressed by hunger, they did not wait for a second invitation. Meager though that supper may have been, there was not a word of complaint, even from Roger. The pemmican tasted good to him, the dry bread was just what he craved, and the bitter decoction which Mayhew had brewed seemed almost like nectar.

Having accomplished its mission, the tiny fire was allowed to die out. Mayhew managed to light his pipe, which appeared to afford him much solace, and all three lay there, taking things as comfortably as possible, while they discussed in low tones the prospects ahead of them.

Each one offered an opinion with regard to what sort of weather they might expect in the near future. In doing this they consulted the stars, together with the prevailing winds, and whether this last seemed to carry any moisture in its breath since that would indicate approaching rain or snow.

It was the general belief that the prospect could be set down as uncertain. It might storm, or another fair day might speed them



“MEAGER THOUGH THAT SUPPER MAY HAVE BEEN, THERE
WAS NOT A WORD OF COMPLAINT”

on their way; matters had not as yet developed far enough to settle this question.

The silence that had accompanied the coming of the night no longer held sway.

From time to time various sounds drifted to their ears to announce that the pine forest bordering the banks of the mysterious Yellowstone River were the haunts of many wild animals that left their dens, after the setting of the sun, for the purpose of roaming the wilderness in search of prey.

Far in the distance they could occasionally hear, when the wind favored, the mad yelping of a pack of gray mountain wolves, undoubtedly on the track of a stag which they meant to have for their midnight supper, if pertinacity and savage pursuit could accomplish it.

Closer at hand there came other sounds. Once the boys stopped speaking, and bent their heads to catch a repetition of a peculiar cry that would have sent a cold chill through any one unaccustomed to woods life.

“That sounded like a painter to me, Dick!” ventured Roger, handling his gun, so as to make sure the weapon was within reach of his hand.

Of course a “painter” meant a panther, for it

was so called by nearly all back-woodsmen and pioneers of that day. And these two lads knew well what a fierce antagonist one of those great gray cats became when wounded, or ferociously hungry.

“Yes, that was just what I thought,” replied Dick; “but there isn’t much chance he’ll bother to pay us a visit to-night. The woods are big enough to give him all the hunting he wants, without trying to invade our camp.”

“There seems to be plenty of life in this valley of the Yellowstone River,” the second boy continued, “and, even if Jasper Williams fails to find the Happy Hunting Grounds he is looking for, he might do lots worse than stay around here.”

“Yes, I am sure there must be lots of fur to be picked up, and we saw plenty of elk, you remember, Roger, as well as other food animals. From what we have learned, the Indians never come in this direction unless they are compelled to by a scarcity of game in other places.”

“All on account of their believing an Evil Spirit haunts the land,” commented Roger. “As for myself, I think all those stories must be made up in the brains of foolish people. I

would never believe one of them unless I saw the things with my own eyes."

"We may know more about them before we finish this journey," Dick remarked complacently.

"When you last examined the tracks left by Jasper Williams and his party, Benjamin, how old did you make them out to be?" inquired Roger of the guide.

"We are one day's journey behind them," came the assured reply.

"And if they should choose to linger on the trail we may overtake them by to-morrow night," added Dick, in order to comfort his cousin.

"Then all I can say," continued Roger, "is that I hope they'll run short of fresh meat, and conclude to loiter on the road. If Jasper only discovers a big colony of beaver in a stream, I think he would be tempted to camp near by and start trapping."

"Yes," Mayhew remarked, reflectively, between puffs, "he is always talking about beaver pelts, and I have heard him say many times that he never could resist taking the broadtails if given a fair opportunity."

"Well, we have seen signs of the houses of

the little animals several times as we came upon streams that flowed into the river," said Roger, "so there may be a chance of our coming upon him before another sun goes down."

The thought appeared to give him satisfaction, and from that time on Dick noticed a difference in Roger's manner. Only one thing kept cropping up to make him sigh occasionally, and this was the possibility of snow catching them, and in a short time obliterating the trail of the party ahead.

The last thing Roger did, before wrapping himself in his blanket, was to step over to where he could look up at the heavens. The stars were shining peacefully. They did not look unusually bright, which would have been a bad outlook, according to the woodsman's reckoning of the weather signs. The bank of low-hanging clouds must have remained close along the horizon, or else passed away by some other route, for he now saw no trace of them.

"I really believe it will be all right, Dick," was his cheerful announcement as he settled down for a good night's sleep.

Dick did not reply; but, knowing how capricious the weather could prove, he had already made up his mind to be surprised at nothing.

Even if he awoke in the morning to find three inches of snow covering the ground, coming so silently they had not known of its fall, he was prepared to take it philosophically. Perhaps, like a wise general, he had already mapped out in his mind just what course they must pursue under such conditions, for Dick Armstrong had always been prone to foresee difficulties, and prepare to meet them as they came.

Roger soon fell asleep. Even his thoughts of the faraway home were of a pleasant nature, and not calculated to keep him awake. Besides, that long day's tramp over so much rough ground had wearied his muscles, and a languor came upon him shortly after he wrapped his blanket about him.

A root served as a pillow. These hardy sons of the frontier needed no down under their heads as they slept. Privations they had been accustomed to from infancy, and a small amount of comfort usually satisfied them. Doubtless their slumber was all the more sound on that account.

Roger had no means of telling whether one hour or five had crept by, when he was aroused by something that gave him a fierce tug. Instantly he was awake, and, although at first he

imagined he must have been dreaming, he changed his mind when he heard a low, snarling sound close to his ears, and felt another of those queer tugs.

It was cold, for, in rolling about as he slept, he must have displaced his blanket.

That jerk at his right leg gave Roger a thrill. He realized that something had taken hold of his fringed deerskin trousers, and was endeavoring to drag him aside. Even as this startling conviction flashed through his mind, for a third time he heard that low growl. It was like that of a dog, when some one approaches while he is gnawing a bone.

Roger slightly raised his head and saw two gleaming yellow spots that seemed to glow like coals of fire.

He knew they were the eyes of some sort of forest beast that was crouching close alongside him; though why it had seized upon his trouser leg and kept up this spasmodic tugging Roger could not comprehend.

Where was his rifle? He put out a hand, groping for the weapon, which action was the signal for more growls, and a spitting sound such as a cat might make. Then he heard a low whispering voice saying:

“Keep still, Roger; don’t move! I’ve got my gun, and can fix him! Steady, now!”

Then came a mighty crash that awoke the echoes of the forest.

CHAPTER VIII

THE VALLEY OF ENCHANTMENT

ROGER knew what was expected of him under such conditions. A regard for his own safety induced him to roll aside. If the wounded animal endeavored to fasten upon his body in its death throes, he preferred to be in some other and safer locality.

There was confusion for a minute or so. Roger, after escaping from the claws of the unseen beast, scrambled first to his knees and then to his feet. He could not think of going back to search for his gun, because something was struggling on the very spot, and he could imagine what that writhing object must be.

So he drew his hunting knife and waited. Then the sounds began to grow fainter, which the boy knew was a promising sign. Finally all became still again.

“Dick!” he whispered.

“Yes, I’m here, Roger,” he heard his cousin say.

“Is he dead, do you think?” asked the other.

"I have just poked about with the barrel of my gun, and touched him," Dick replied. "There's no movement to the body, so I feel sure I finished him. Come this way; I felt your gun with my foot just now."

They had no means of seeing the motionless form of Dick's quarry, unless they chose to go to great trouble with flint and steel and tinder. There was really no need of this, because all of them were familiar with the denizens of the forest; so that, using their hands, they readily ascertained the nature of the invader of the camp.

"Why, it's only a wildcat, after all, Dick!" exclaimed Roger, a note of disappointment in his tones, as he came upon the abbreviated tail. "I was so sure it was the painter we heard crying earlier in the night."

"I thought the same way, Roger," confessed the other, "until I came to feel the fur, when something told me it was different. But we never yet killed such a wildcat as this, in all our tramping."

"It does seem to be a monster," admitted the other.

"It is not only the size I meant, Roger, but feel of the ears."

“Why, how very strange, Dick; for all the world like a tassel at the end! What kind of a beast have we run across? We never saw wildcats like this along the Missouri, you know.”

“I have heard old voyageurs tell about a species they meet with further north in the cold country of the Chippewas and the Crees. They call it a lynx in Canada. It is a very fierce beast, all accounts agree.”

“But, Dick, think of his coming right into our camp, and trying to carry me off! I never would have believed it if any one had told the story. He tugged at my leg again and again. It was that woke me up, I expect. If that’s the kind of wildcats they have in this country, I am not surprised at the Indians keeping away from this region.”

“There must be some reason for the beast acting as it did. I think we will find that in rolling about you must have managed to get over the spot where Benjamin laid our stock of pemmican, and that was what the beast was after.”

“Oh! do you think so?” remarked Roger, heaving a sigh of relief. “Well, I shall be glad to believe he was not trying to carry me off.

But all the same, Dick, you never before heard of a wildcat being so bold."

"I never did, and that is a fact," admitted Dick.

They settled down once more, though this time Roger changed his position so as to make sure he would not invite a repetition of the attack. Mayhew, too, had taken warning from the adventure; he proceeded to fasten their stock of dried venison to the limb of a tree in such a way that it would be safe from the depredations of any hungry animal.

That one alarm was not repeated. Throughout the balance of the night prowling wild beasts might roam the forest and seek their prey, but they gave the camp of the little party a wide berth. Perhaps they scented trouble in the blood of their kind that had already been spilled.

With the coming of dawn the boys were up and doing. Roger examined the stiffened form of the lynx with much curiosity. He seemed to be of the opinion that, since the ice had now been broken, they were apt to run across many other strange creatures, the like of which they had never before set eyes on.

Indeed, before they had been an hour on the

way that morning, they began to notice that a remarkable change was taking place in the character of their surroundings. The sun's rays, falling on the face of a hill, filled them with awe, for it seemed to reveal almost every hue of the rainbow. Here a waterfall burst upon their vision, the stream dropping fully a hundred feet, and looking like a bridal wreath as the light breeze carried the fine spray to leeward, through several rainbows.

"The Enchanted Land, of a truth, Dick!" was Roger's comment, as they came to a full stop, to gaze upon these remarkable sights.

"Already it begins to look to me as though there might be some truth in the weird stories the Indians have been telling about this country up here," the other boy confessed.

As for Mayhew, the guide, he could not find words to describe the mingled feelings of admiration and wonder that filled his soul. None of them dreamed of turning back, although they were beginning to encounter sights such as the eyes of white men had possibly never before beheld.

"Jasper was not dismayed by all this," said Dick, "for we can see that he and his party kept on, following the course of this river of

the cataracts and the rapids. So we, too, must march on."

"I feel thirsty," remarked Roger, shortly after this, "and as here runs a nice looking little stream I think I will take a drink."

Dick was about to follow suit when he saw Roger suddenly start up from his kneeling position, with a look of the most intense astonishment on his face.

"Why, Dick, it burns me!" he cried. "The water is hot!"

Dick immediately tested it with his hand.

"Just as you say, Roger, it seems as though it might be over a fire. Do you know, I noticed something like a trace of steam, but I thought it only such vapor as we often see rising from ice-cold water."

"But who ever before met with boiling water in the open?" asked Roger. "Why, there must be fires under the earth here, such as leap out of volcanoes in other countries."

He even rested his hand on the rock close by, but found it cold. Vegetation grew all around the hot stream and pool, showing that it never overflowed its banks at any time.

"There's one good thing about it," remarked Dick, turning to the frontiersman; "after this,

if these hot springs are common here, you will never need to build a fire in order to make a pannikin of tea."

"I can believe almost anything after this," muttered Roger, as he dabbled his hand in the pool, and quickly snatched it out again, for the water seemed to almost scald his flesh. "Of course nothing can live in such a stream. I wonder what next we will run across. Cats with tassels on their ears, rocks and mud looking like they had been painted every color going, waterfalls that drop from the clouds, and where rainbows play hide and seek in the sunlight, and now a boiling spring, and a hot pool. What if one of us had fallen in here, and could not get out?"

"We'll soon begin to believe in those stories the red men tell of the Evil Spirits that live in this enchanted valley," laughed Dick, who seemed determined not to allow himself to be dismayed by anything wonderful they might encounter in their wanderings.

"I'm getting that way even now, Dick. I tell you, it wouldn't surprise me very much if we ran upon one of those monsters they say used to live in America centuries and centuries ago, much larger than an elephant. I only hope

my rifle speaks true, if ever I have to face anything like that!"

Leaving the hot spring behind them, they pushed on along the trail made by Jasper Williams's party. Doubtless those three men were also filled with wonder at what they saw. Roger more than once expressed doubt as to whether they would have the courage to continue their explorations much further, surrounded as they found themselves by such marvelous freaks of nature.

"It wouldn't surprise me if we met them hurrying back out of here," he told his companions. "Jasper himself is a bold spirit, but I have a poor opinion of the two other men with him. I believe they are inclined to be superstitious, like the Indians, and these things are enough to make the flesh creep."

Here and there, as openings occurred, they could catch glimpses of distant peaks that looked like cathedral spires in the gilding rays of the sun. Dick was drinking in these pictures with eagerness, for the boy had something of the artist in his nature. He could appreciate such glorious works wrought by the deft hand of nature more fully than Roger, who saw rather the practical side of the picture.

Once, during that morning tramp, Roger did receive a fright. It did not come from any threatened attack on the part of a ferocious wild beast, nor yet through his narrow escape from falling into some pit where strange, gurgling, mysterious sounds oozed forth. On the contrary it was just because it started to snow furiously, so that the whole landscape was blotted out.

"That settles it, Dick," he exclaimed, in sheer disgust, "we're done for now. The only thing left us is to head as best we may for the place we believe the Valley of Wonders lies, and which we must be close to, right now."

"You are in too big a hurry, Roger," his cousin told him. "Just because a few flakes chance to come down is no proof that we are in for a storm. Look up and you will see the blue sky over yonder. It is only a passing squall, and soon over with, so cheer up."

His prophecy proved true, because in another minute the snow ceased to fall, and out came the welcome sun again, to once more paint the hillsides with his wondrous brush, and stripe them with rainbow tints.

"You must own up that most of our troubles come and go like that," commented Dick. "At

first they seem to be dark and heavy, but all at once the sun breaks out, and we forget the gloomy past. It ought to be a lesson to you."

"I know it, Dick, but my nature is different from yours. I am either bubbling over with joy or else weighed down with foreboding. But we can see some distance ahead at this point, and I must confess that there is no sign of a human being, so Jasper and his comrades cannot be returning along the trail."

"The wind is shifting for one thing," observed Dick, "which may bring about a change in the weather before very long."

"Listen, what do you suppose that sound can be? If the weather were not so cold, and the season summer instead of early winter, I would surely say it was distant thunder!"

All three stood still to listen intently. Presently the far-away rumbling sound was again borne to their ears; and, just as Roger had declared, it was like distant thunder coming from beyond the range of forest-clad hills.

It was not strange that the two boys and the frontiersman turned uneasy looks upon each other, surrounded as they were by such strange freaks of nature.

CHAPTER IX

SURROUNDED BY MYSTERIES

“WHAT about the swivel gun in the camp; could it be heard as far away as this, do you think, Dick?” asked Roger, as though a new idea had flashed into his mind.

The other shook his head in the negative.

“Hardly,” he replied, “and, even if it were possible, you forget that it is only when the wind picks up from this new quarter that we hear the sound.”

“And that is from the northwest, while our camp lies back yonder, more in the northeast,” admitted Roger. “I admit that, when I spoke, I was picturing a horde of half-naked Indians trying to carry the camp by storm, and Captain Clark rallying his defenders behind the breastworks we built out of pine logs and earth.”

“It is nothing of that sort, I am sure,” said Dick, “though, when you ask me to explain the

origin of that sound, I am as much in the dark as you."

"Well, as our way lies toward the northwest," remarked Roger, "there's some satisfaction in knowing we will be getting closer to the mystery all the time."

"I am glad to see that you are not afraid, Roger."

"There can be no telling what state I may be in before we get out of this strange country," admitted Roger, laughingly. But Dick knew him too well to think he could show any sign of fear.

Mayhew said little, for he was naturally a man of few words. He could not be reckoned as above the average of his class; and possibly there was a well-defined streak of superstition in his nature, even as it was to be found in other bordermen of the day.

Left to his own devices, perhaps Mayhew would have much preferred not to advance any further into this unknown and terrifying land. He had no particular desire to learn whether the stories told were true or false; and the camp that had been left behind held many alluring claims to his regard.

But his honor as a reliable borderman was

in the balance. He could not forget that, chiefly through his carelessness, there had been lost a paper entrusted to his charge, which was of the utmost value to these lads.

Hence he was firmly resolved to stand by them, no matter what happened, for the object of their venture was to duplicate the document he had allowed to slip out of his hands.

“There is the river over yonder; I can see the sun shining on the tumbling water of one of the numerous cataracts,” Dick commented, as he pointed in the direction indicated.

“The Indians have a story to the effect that it springs from a great fresh water inland sea lying over the ridges somewhere,” Roger remarked, as he stood looking at the foaming surface of the stream. “Do you believe there is any truth in that account, Dick; or can it be set down as a fable, like this Evil Spirit of the land?”

“Oh! it seems that others have looked upon the great lake at a distance, French traders and voyageurs, and they say it is surely there,” the other affirmed. “Who knows but that, before we see our good friend Captain Lewis again, we, too, may be able to boast of having set eyes on the mirror lake.”

“Captain Lewis told me he would give much for the privilege of accompanying us; but duty would not permit,” Roger observed.

“Yes, he cannot forget that the President committed the fate of this exploration into his hands, and looks to him to supply all the information possible,” said Dick. “So Captain Lewis, like an honorable and conscientious gentleman, will not take any unnecessary risk in order to gratify his curiosity. His place is there in the camp.”

Feeling hungry as noon arrived they munched some of the hard pemmican while keeping on the move. That suited the impetuous Roger, for it was virtually “killing two birds with one stone”; they satisfied their hunger, and yet found no reason to delay their progress in order to do so.

Mayhew still found a way to discern the trail of those who had gone over this same ground ahead of them. Indeed, it would have to be a faint track that his practiced eyes failed to discover.

All this while there had been a perceptible change in the character of the country. It kept getting more rocky, and wilder the further they advanced. Roger was constantly looking on all

sides as though expecting to discover some new and remarkable thing at any minute. Indeed, Dick was also considerably worked up over the strange conditions surrounding them, and made up his mind not to be surprised at anything that might happen.

It was when they were in this receptive frame of mind that something occurred out of the common, to alarm them. Roger was the first to hear a sound, though Dick, seeing him come to a sudden halt, and stand in an attitude of listening, also began to catch it.

"Hold on, Benjamin," said Dick, in a low tone, "there's something queer going on around us that we must look into before proceeding further."

"Of all the strange things, did you ever hear such a terrible groaning before, Dick?" asked Roger. "I wonder if it has anything to do with the noise we caught before, that was so like thunder."

"Hardly, for that was surely far away, while this is close by," replied the other boy, with a puzzled look on his sun-browned face.

Roger even took off his foxskin cap, as though he imagined that the dangling flaps which he used to keep his ears warm in bitter

weather might interfere with his sense of hearing.

Again those strange groanings made themselves heard. This time both boys managed to locate the sound as coming from the right. That was at least one point gained, and it was toward that quarter they now turned their attention.

If they had been trying to pick out the most difficult spot in all the wild vicinity, they would have selected that toward which their attention was now directed. The rocks seemed to be piled on one another in hap-hazard fashion. Here and there they formed deep chasms, the sides of which were so precipitous as to be incapable of being scaled by any creature short of a monkey.

“It comes welling up out of the ground itself, Dick,” ventured Roger, presently, with awe in his manner, as though, after all, he might be wondering whether there could be any truth in the tales told of the Evil Spirit that haunted these weird ridges, speaking in thunder tones at one minute, and with dreadful groanings the next.

Dick believed in taking the bull by the horns in a case like this.

"We must look into it, Roger; it would never do for us to say we had been driven away through hearing some mysterious sound that we did not understand."

"There it comes again, Dick, and louder than before. What can it be?"

"The hot spring seemed to tell of some sort of fires away under the surface of the ground," the other said, reflectively, "and it might be that this is more of the hot vapor pressing up through holes in the rocks."

"But how like human groans the sounds are!" marveled Roger.

"I agree with you," his companion returned, "but have you forgotten the time we heard those terrifying noises coming from the old mill that stood a mile away from our homes, and how some of our companions fled, but we had the hardihood to go inside and look around?"

"Yes," interjected Roger, quickly, "and we found the wind forced a way through a crack between two logs, and made the doleful noise! It may be something like that here."

"We will soon know, because I mean to make my way over there and take a good look around," announced Dick.

"If you go I will keep you company!" declared Roger, just as stoutly, as he gave a glance down, in order to make sure that the powder in the pan of his flint-lock rifle had not been disturbed, and that the weapon was ready for instant use.

Together they advanced, with Mayhew keeping them company. All were constantly on the alert for signs of treachery and danger. Those who dealt with the tricky red sons of the forest in the pioneer days learned to be always on the watch.

Now the sounds ceased, and the boys exchanged looks, as if asking each other whether this could have anything to do with their arrival. Were hostile eyes watching them from some rocky covert; and would a signal be given to launch an attack?

Dick, examining what lay just beyond, came to a conclusion.

"There is a gaping hole yonder, you see, Roger?" he noted.

"Where the rocks seem to drop straight down, you mean?" replied the other.

"Yes, and it is out of that hole the sounds came. Let us stand here, and wait to see if we can hear them again."

They had not long to wait. Even as they stood listening intently, there came once more a long-drawn moan, which was followed by others. Then succeeded a rattling sound as though some heavy body were endeavoring to creep up the slanting rock, only to slip back again. They even heard the thud that seemed to announce the end of the vain attempt.

Still it was all unintelligible to both Dick and Roger. While the groans continued to well up out of the basin, they again started to creep forward. The brink was within plain sight, and in another minute they would be in position to peer over the edge.

What new and terrifying wonder they might discover there they could not even guess, yet it was with a thrill that the lads kept on, covering the intervening rock foot by foot.

They reached the brink together, and both immediately thrust out their heads to take the first look. Only for a brief space of time did they stare downward, and then, just as a cautious tortoise might draw back his head within his shell, Dick and his companion retreated.

“Oh!” gasped Roger, as he turned his face, filled with perplexity, toward the other, “did you see what it was, Dick?”

“After all, nothing so strange as we thought,” replied the other. “Instead of a supernatural happening, it was real human groans we heard. There are men trapped in that hole, and they have tried again and again to climb up, always to slip back again. They must be battered, and nearly starved, which would be enough to make them groan, I think.”

“But, Dick, I saw one of them plainly, and I knew him, too!” urged Roger, bluntly.

“Then you saw more than I did,” the other told him. “From the fact that they are dressed in buckskin I knew they must be hunters or trappers, but supposed it would turn out that they were French voyageurs, such as have roamed throughout the Northwest country since the time of Pontiac. Who was the man you saw, Roger?”

“It was surely Thomas Hardy, one of the men who accompanied Jasper Williams,” said Roger, showing much concern. “And I believe the other to be Mordaunt, the second frontiersman and trapper. But there is no third in the party. What can have become of Williams? If he is dead there is an end to all our hopes. Oh, Dick, I am afraid!”

Dick’s face had also lost much of its custom-

ary color, for a spasm of alarm had attacked his bold heart when his companion thus voiced his fears.

CHAPTER X

ATTACKED BY HOSTILE BLACKFEET

“CHEER up, Roger!” said Dick, making an effort to look as though he himself had no fear of disaster. “I’ve often heard my father say it is foolish to cross a bridge before you reach it. The first thing for us to do is to let these poor fellows in the trap know we are here.”

When there was a prospect for action Roger could rouse himself wonderfully.

“And we must get them out of that deep hole by hook or by crook, Dick!” he exclaimed.

The two pushed forward until they could look down toward the place where they had discovered the forlorn figures of the prisoners.

“Hello! Hardy—Mordaunt!” called Dick, just loud enough to make his voice carry to the men. He did not know what danger might be near, and on this account believed it the part of wisdom to be careful.

Immediately the pair below looked up. When they discovered the boys they manifested

the greatest delight, even to shaking hands with each other. Evidently they had been close to the point of despair.

"We're going to get you out of that hole first of all!" called Dick, "and then you can tell us what happened."

"Where is Jasper Williams?" demanded Roger, unable to restrain his impatience longer.

"We do not know," came the discouraging answer.

"Then he isn't down there with you?" pursued Roger.

"No. The last we saw of Jasper he was still alive, although hotly pursued."

Naturally these last words excited Roger's curiosity more than ever. He could easily guess that the party must have met with a stirring adventure of some sort, and if Williams had fled it must have been hostile Indians who pursued him. But Dick would not hear of any further delay in starting work.

"Come, Roger, I shall need your assistance," he told the other. "Bottle up your curiosity until we can get those poor fellows up out of the pit. They seem to be injured more or less, for Hardy has a bandage around his arm that looks bloody."

Roger was only too willing to render what aid he could, though the fact struck him that they were not likely to find it plain sailing.

“If they couldn’t climb up out of that hole on account of the smooth face of the rock, how shall we go down to help them, Dick?” he demanded.

“That would be foolish,” was the reply. “We must plan to draw them up here.”

“But, Dick, where is the rope to come from? We brought nothing of the sort from the camp?”

“Then we must find a substitute. Look back at some of our experiences, and tell me if we have not done that more than once when in the forest?”

“Why, yes, a wild grape-vine can often be made to serve the purpose of a rope, because it is tough and long and pliable. But where can we get such a thing now?”

“As it happens, I noticed some vines growing not far back, and I am leading you to the place now. Look over yonder at that little swale, where the trees grow so densely; there are vines hanging from the branches, for I saw them swaying in the breeze.”

“Yes, I do believe you are right,” admitted Roger, who possessed splendid eyesight. “I only hope we find one long enough.”

"Oh! as to that," responded Dick, calmly, "we could easily splice a pair of them. There's nearly always a way to do things if only you make up your mind to do them."

They soon arrived at the patch of swampy ground where the undergrowth grew so densely. It was an ideal place for wild grape-vines, and small wonder that they grew to such a length, some twisting in spirals around the trunks of the trees, others hanging from limbs that were fully twenty feet overhead.

Roger gave expression to his satisfaction the minute he set eyes on this network of vines.

"No trouble getting what we want here, I should say, Dick. Look at that monster vine; though this one seems better fitted for our purposes, because it is like a stout rope, if only it proves tough enough to hold a weight."

"No trouble about that, I'm thinking," said Dick. "You could hang half a ton on that vine and it would hold. You are a better climber than I ever claimed to be, so get up the tree and cut it loose above."

Nothing suited Roger better than this. Laying his gun down, together with his powder-horn, which might be in the way, he started up the tree indicated. Arriving at the limb to

which the vine they had selected seemed to be fastened he first examined it carefully, and then with his knife soon cut it free.

“Take care while I drop it, Dick!” he called, and shortly afterwards descended to the ground.

The vine was quickly trimmed so as to free it from useless growth, and, dragging it after them, the lads once more went to the brink of the pit that had proved a trap for the members of the exploring party.

When this substitute for a rope was lowered it was found to be quite long enough for their purpose. One of the men immediately started to climb, and what before had seemed an insurmountable task now became easy.

Ten minutes later both had been rescued from their predicament. They were shivering from exposure and fright, and the first thing the boys did was to make a small fire in a depression amidst the rocks, over which some water was heated, and a pannikin of tea brewed.

When the men had eaten something, and washed it down with liberal portions of the hot tea, Roger could hold back no longer. He wanted to learn what had happened, and how they had become separated from Jasper Williams.

The men had evidently been through a rough experience, and seemed to have lost all inclination to proceed any further into the unknown country of mysteries. Indeed, from certain words that they had dropped, it was plain nothing could induce them to return. They meant to head directly toward the camp near the Mandan village.

This being the case, Dick was anxious to learn all he could before the separation came about, and so he did not attempt to chide Roger on account of the other's impatience when he burst out with:

"Now please tell us what it was all about, and who pursued Jasper Williams at the time you saw him last?"

Hardy seemed to be the best talker, for it was he who answered.

"The Indians came down on us when we were not expecting an attack," he explained, looking somewhat humiliated, for a frontiersman was apt to feel a blush of shame when compelled to admit that for once his vigilance had relaxed.

"Were you in camp at the time?" asked Roger.

"Yes, close to the river," Hardy continued. "We had been seeing some wonderful things,

and Jasper seemed to believe there were others even more amazing beyond. Then, like a bolt out of the clear sky, they dropped down on us. Some sprang from the bushes, while others appeared on the river in canoes made from dugout logs."

He drew a long breath, as though the recollection of that sudden attack would give him a bad feeling for a long time to come.

"But you must have snatched up your guns and fought them?" pursued Roger, who could not picture Jasper Williams doing anything less, since he had the reputation of being an unusually valiant borderman.

"That was what we did," replied Hardy. "After shooting and wounding some of our enemies we clubbed our guns and strove to beat our way clear of the howling pack. In some fashion Jasper became separated from us. We managed to burst through the Indians, and fled for the thickest of the neighboring woods. Somehow we did not seem to be pursued, and, wondering at that, I looked over my shoulder, hearing the yells of the savages growing fainter."

"Yes, and what did you see?" Roger demanded.

“Jasper had managed to leap into one of their canoes, and was paddling like mad up the rough water of the Yellowstone, with the other boats in hot pursuit. They vanished from our sight around a bend in the stream, but for a long time we could hear the sound of distant yells when the wind turned that way.”

“You do not know certainly, then, that Jasper was captured or killed?” Dick asked.

“We cannot say,” replied Hardy. “All we thought about then was to get away from that region, and start back to the camp. We have seen enough of this wild country to satisfy us. By accident we managed in the darkness of the night to fall into that hole, and we have been held prisoners there ever since, suffering all the tortures of cold, hunger and despair. When we heard you call out it seemed to us the finest sound we had ever listened to.”

The men had finished their meal by now, and seemed anxious to make a start over the back trail. Dick did not attempt to influence them to change their decision, for he knew it would be futile. As they had both lost their powder-horns in the fight, and their long-barreled guns were useless without ammunition, he managed to spare a small amount of the precious

stuff, enough to give them several charges apiece.

“You can shoot game, and live in that way until you reach camp,” he told them as he watched both men eagerly load their guns. “But what of these Indians who attacked your party—they were not of the Sioux or the Mandan tribes, I take it?”

“No—Blackfeet, and hard fighters,” the man replied. “I do not believe they would have allowed us to escape, only that they seemed most anxious to get Jasper Williams, for all of them pursued him, some in boats and the rest on land.”

This struck Dick as peculiar. Why should Jasper Williams count any more with the hostile Blackfeet than the other two explorers? His hair would make a no better looking scalp than theirs!

Dick was still pondering over this as he shook the two men by the hand and expressed the hope that they would meet with no further troubles until they gained the camp and gave his message to Captain Lewis.

“Have you arrived at any conclusion, Hardy,” he observed, “as to why the Indians should want to capture Jasper Williams so

badly that they would neglect you two, and even let you escape?"

"We talked that over, Mordaunt and myself, while we were in the pit," came the answer, "and both of us decided that the men who were with the Blackfeet must have hated our companion, and had promised a reward to the redskins if he was captured. That only would explain the mystery, we thought."

"Why, were there white men with the Indians?" cried Dick, beginning to see a gleam of light. "Were they English, or frontiersmen, or French?"

"They must have been French, because we heard them calling out, and it was in that language. They seemed wild with anger because Jasper had not fallen into their hands. In the boats they kept shouting to the paddlers, and urging them to greater exertion. Yes, the Frenchmen must hate our companion, and I fear he will never live to come back to us again."

As the two men walked away, heading toward the northeast, Dick and Roger exchanged significant looks, for they now knew the worst.

CHAPTER XI

ON THE BANK OF THE YELLOWSTONE

“BAD news for us, Dick,” muttered Roger, shaking his head despondently.

“I am sorry it had to happen,” the other remarked; “but while there’s life there’s hope. Jasper is no novice in woodcraft. Those Frenchmen and their red allies will find it no easy task to capture him. And even if they should we are bound to try to bring about his release.”

“It must have been that François Lascelles and his rascally son, Alexis, surely,” ventured Roger.

“Yes, I am sure of it,” Dick admitted, frowning.

“They were not satisfied with destroying the paper we had sent home, but came back to keep us from getting Jasper to sign another. Oh! they are determined to steal our homes away from us! They will stop at nothing to take them!”

“All is not lost yet. Remember that we have

always managed to pull through in times past. We shall again; something seems to tell me so."

When Dick said this he looked so determined and resolute that, as usual, Roger found his own spirits wonderfully revived.

"I complain a lot, I know," he remarked, as though ashamed of his actions, "but all the same I give up hard. Deep down there's a never-say-die feeling in my heart. When you say we will keep everlastingly at it you express what I feel."

Both felt better after that. They knew that it was useless to pay any further attention to the faint trail of Jasper Williams and his two companions. They must trust partly to luck in order to once more run across the man they so urgently desired to see.

"One thing we must remember," said Dick, as they again set forth on their way.

"What is that?" asked Roger.

"We have come to know Jasper fairly well since joining the exploring company, and helping him to escape from Running Elk's Sioux. We even know some of his signals, and if we have any reason to believe he is around we can make use of them to communicate with him."

"That is a good idea," agreed Roger.

“Even if he is a prisoner we could let him know friends were near by using the secret call. But we seem to be making for the bank of the river; tell me what plan you have in mind now.”

“You heard me ask Hardy about the exact place they were set upon by the Blackfeet? That is where we must go first of all. Trail we have none, for the last seen of Jasper he was on the water, which leaves no track. But, starting from that point we will follow up the river until we find something.”

“We could not do better, I am sure,” acknowledged the other, and Mayhew nodded his head as though he also concurred in the plan.

“If the Frenchmen are Lascelles and his son,” continued Dick, as they trudged along, “they would not care if Jasper were killed, so long as he could not interfere again in their scheme to defraud our parents out of their property.”

“Yes,” added Roger, impulsively, “and, should our friend be captured, they would influence the Blackfeet to carry him far away to their village in the Northwest country, where he would be made to adopt their ways and become an Indian warrior. Either that, or else he would be burned at the stake, after their usual custom with prisoners of war.”

"We are close to the river," Dick announced.

The Yellowstone is a very turbulent stream, especially far up toward where it has its source in the great lake of the same name. It rushes down over its rocky bed with numerous cataracts, making navigation impossible to any but canoes managed by the most experienced paddlers.

The fretting of its current was plainly audible long before the little party arrived on the bank. Above and below, it wound in and out, seldom keeping a direct course for half a mile, such was the roughness of the country through which it found a passage.

Without wasting any time in admiring the wonderful picture that was now spread out before them, the three scouts turned up-stream, and continued to advance. They were anxious to reach the scene of the fight between Jasper Williams's little band and the Blackfeet, set upon them by the unscrupulous French traders.

Having now been made aware of the fact that hostile Indians were roaming the vicinity, they exercised more caution than up to this time had marked their pilgrimage into the unknown land.

An hour—two of them—passed, and thus far nothing had occurred to disturb their peace of

mind. All this time they had continued pushing forward. Occasionally they would make a little roundabout passage so as to clear an open glade where the danger of discovery was imminent. No discordant yells from savage throats arose to thrill them.

"It seems to be a long way off, Dick," ventured Roger, who evidently had not taken into consideration the fact that at the time of the attack Williams and his companions were something like half a day's journey along.

"We must be getting close to the place now," he was assured. "I was just deciding that the next bend in the river would turn out to be where they made their camp. Hardy told us, you remember, that they had hardly settled down there last evening when they were attacked."

"Yes, it was an hour before sunset," he said. "They were feeling tired, and the chance for a fine camp tempted them to stop long before dark came on. Hardy tried to describe the place to us, and I suppose you think you can recognize it from the way the trees hang out over the water?"

"That is what I settled in my mind; but we'll soon know. Given half an hour and we should be there."

The time dragged with the always impetuous Roger; but finally they arrived at the bend of the river indicated. All immediately began to look for signs to prove that the men had camped there.

A joyous exclamation from keen-eyed Roger announced that he had found the dead ashes of a fire in a little depression among the rocks. Then the others discovered footprints of moccasined feet, many of them in the softer places where the earth was not yet frozen.

“Here are the tracks of Indians, for they all toe in,” Dick observed, stating a fact that was well known to every pioneer boy of the day. “Toeing-in” was invariably the sign of an Indian, though of course some bordermen had also taken to that method of walking, which is supposed to be the natural way.

“And these others were made by whites, either our friends or the Frenchmen,” added Roger, quick to pick out those that differed from the first type.

“I am looking for the track of Jasper,” Dick told him, as he continued to move this way and that, his eyes searching the ground as he neared the bank of the river.

“But tell me how you would know his trail

from any other? Most moccasins make pretty much the same kind of a mark, I've always believed."

"Well, Williams's do not, it happens," the other explained. "I thought you must have noticed it as we came along. He bought the pair he is wearing from a Mandan squaw. They have a queer seam across the middle. I never saw one like it before, and I think that is the track now."

He pointed to the ground, and Roger, looking, gave a cry of satisfaction.

"It certainly is as you say, and here must be where Jasper jumped when he made for the water, and sprang into one of the dugouts. See, in many places his footprints are partly covered by those of the pursuing Blackfeet."

"And this must be where he found the canoe into which he jumped," continued Dick, as he showed his companion a slight depression in the sand.

Both stood and looked up the turbulent river. The water tumbled over the rocks that thrust their heads above the surface in many places; it even leaped high in the air and sent out clouds of spray where a cataract could be seen over toward the other shore. But whatever secret it

held it gripped tightly, and neither of the boys could lift the veil.

"I wish we knew what happened up there, and if Jasper did get away, or was taken by those plotting French traders and their red allies," mused Roger.

"Well, it will do no good for us to stop here and wish," his companion told him. "There is work to be done, and the sooner we start the quicker we can reach the end. One thing is sure, if Jasper is alive, whether free or a prisoner, we will find him!"

There was no need of lingering any longer, since they had learned all that could be ascertained. It fitted in with the story told by the two men who had been Jasper Williams's companions.

"It seems to me our next best course would be to keep along the border of the river," remarked Dick. "If those who were in the canoes came ashore it would likely be on this side of the stream, because it seems to be a better channel than on the other side.

"Besides, if we watch out we can see the marks left by those of the Blackfeet who ran along the shore expecting to head Jasper off; though I don't think they could do that, because

in many places they would have to pass around deep coves that lead many rods inland.”

For some time they followed the river. Now and then they managed to discover some tracks of the Indians, but at the end these seemed to be missing, and it was concluded that the band must have left the stream to pass further back in the country.

Unable to find any trace of them, the boys were placed in the position of not knowing whether Jasper had been taken or not. The going became so difficult, and the hope of reward so slight, that in the end they determined it would be best to also leave the river, and take to the higher ground.

Here they could wander about, constantly on the watch for some sign that would indicate a temporary camping place of those whom they sought. If a wisp of trailing smoke caught their attention it would do much to locate the resting place of the Indians. They must eat, and particularly the Frenchmen would desire a warm meal, so that in this way those who sought them might be rewarded for their vigilance.

Hope was struggling with despair in Roger's heart. Look as he might, he could not see any silver lining to the dark cloud. Still, the energy

and resolution that his companion continued to show buoyed up his own sinking spirits to a considerable extent.

They had now left the river far behind, and had entered upon a new phase of their journey. Several times at stated intervals they had heard that singular deep throated rumble, and felt the ground tremble under their feet. Whatever it could be that caused this strange sound, they were evidently approaching the scene of its mysterious operations, and might come upon it at any time.

It was about the middle of the afternoon when Mayhew uttered the low hiss which they had settled on as a warning of danger. At that instant Roger and Dick also caught glimpses of flitting figures amidst the forest trees, which they knew must be Indians.

CHAPTER XII

UNEXPECTED HELP

THE three dropped to the ground, where they flattened themselves out so as to be as inconspicuous as possible. Of course the prospect of approaching trouble caused the hearts of the boys to beat doubly fast, but they managed to control themselves.

“Do you think they saw us?” whispered Roger, finding his head close to that of his comrade.

“We will soon know,” replied the other, in the same cautious manner. “They have not given a single yelp as yet. But Mayhew is beckoning to us. He wants us to crawl along after him, where these bushes will shield us.”

They kept as close to the ground as possible while making progress. Now and then one of them would carefully raise his head to take an observation. When this chanced to be Dick, his cousin invariably whispered an inquiry in his ear, which the other answered with a movement of the head.

They could hardly believe that the keen-eyed Indians had failed to notice their presence, though it did seem strange that they should have refrained from announcing their delight at the discovery in fierce yelps, as was their custom.

Mayhew undoubtedly had some sort of plan in mind when he beckoned the others to follow. He was an experienced scout, and knew as much about the tricky ways of the red men as any borderer of his time. It was on this account that Captain Clark had suggested that he accompany the boys on this trip, as well as to allow Mayhew a chance to repair the damage his blunder had done to their cause.

Three times he abruptly changed his course. Evidently he had a reason for this, and Dick suspected that the guide must have discovered the enemy to be lying in wait for them ahead.

It was thrilling, but tiresome. Roger found himself wishing heartily that something would happen to break the silence. It seemed to be oppressive, to be weighing him down as with a heavy load. Indeed, to the impulsive lad almost anything would be preferable to this terrible stillness.

It was while Roger was allowing himself to give way to this feeling, and wondering whether,

after all, it might not do better if they sprang to their feet and ran for it, that something did occur, and of a nature to surprise him.

Crouching at the foot of a tree, and just about to slowly get to his knees in order to take an observation, Roger suddenly felt himself pulled down. Dick had seized his hunting tunic, and given it a quick, strong tug.

At the same instant Roger heard an odd, whistling sound that seemed to come from a point very close to his ear; this in turn was succeeded by a little thud, such as one might make when striking his hunting knife against the bark of a tree.

As the boy twisted his head around, his wondering eyes fell upon something that caused him to draw in a long quavering breath. It was the feathered shaft of a Blackfoot arrow that had its flint head buried deep in the yielding wood of the tree. In order to have reached that spot it must have passed only a few inches above Roger's body.

Then the Indians *did* know of their presence; the fact of this shaft having been sent in their direction told the story. Roger somehow found himself wondering if those stories he had heard about the Blackfoot warriors poisoning the tips

of their war arrows could have any foundation in truth. It was not a pleasant thought when they found themselves at bay, surrounded by an unknown number of the savage tribesmen.

But Mayhew was once more creeping on; if he did not wish to be left behind he must follow in the wake of the guide.

Dick brought up the rear. It may have been accident that brought this about, and, then again, perhaps the boy had some design in taking his place at the end of the line. He knew the impulsive ways of his cousin, and that there was always a chance that Roger might get himself into trouble through lack of caution.

Possibly the guide had knowledge of some locality that lay a short distance beyond, where they could defend themselves better than in the open. The face of the country was rough, and in many places rocks cropped out that could be made to serve those who were surrounded by perils.

Once again was the whistle of a feathered shaft heard, though this time it simply cut through the bushes over their heads, and found no lodgment in the trunk of a tree.

This was the second narrow escape they had had. It was not to be expected that such good

fortune would continue. Other arrows were bound to be fired, and at any minute one better aimed than the rest might find lodgment in a human body.

Roger gritted his teeth savagely as he crept on. How he wished Mayhew would come to a pause, thus signifying he had done all he could to further their escape, and was now at the end of his rope! Then they could rise up, and use their guns upon the crafty enemy, following with the pistols they also carried, and which at short range would count for just as much as the rifles.

Was the ground actually trembling underneath, or did his own shaky condition deceive him? Roger could not decide this question off hand. It seemed to him that, when he placed a hand on the rocks, it felt a warmth that was unmistakable. At any other time he would have wanted to stop to discover why this should be so; but the conditions by which they were surrounded just then would hardly permit such a waste of precious seconds.

In imagination Roger could see the Indians creeping up, bows and arrows in hand, waiting until a certain point had been reached, when they would give a concerted whoop, and rush to the attack.

He wondered if they had ever heard a gun fired at close quarters and, if not, whether the sound would alarm them. It had proved to be the case in other instances he had heard old trappers mention, where they were saved through the fear shown by the savages at hearing the crash, and seeing the flash, when guns had been discharged.

Ah! that was a third arrow he heard hurtling past, and it must have shivered into splinters against that rock when it struck. Either the marksmen were sending their missiles at random, or else they had some design in thus driving the three crouching whites forward. Was there some sort of a trap beyond, into which they might fall? Roger was of half a mind to turn on Dick, and demand that they change their method of retreat into one of open defiance.

There was no need of his taking this step, because circumstances decided for him. Even as he was hesitating, and more than half inclined to force the issue, there broke out such ear-piercing yells as neither of the two boys had ever heard before.

To Roger's mind that settled it, once and for all. Further flight was useless—at least, flight of the slow and hesitating type they had been

trying to carry out. If they chose to try to escape without a fight, then they must take to their heels, dodging to the right and the left so as to avoid the rain of arrows that was sure to follow them.

To scramble to their feet was the work of an instant. All held their weapons ready for immediate use, because they believed they would have need of them, with the enemy charging from several points at once.

When Roger looked around he found it hard to decide where to send the bullet his gun carried. Here and there he could catch glimpses of flashing forms as they darted from rock to rock; but all these movements were executed with such surprising quickness that, although he several times started to raise his rifle, before he could obtain any sort of aim the object of his attention had vanished.

Perhaps the quivering tip of a colored feather worn in the hair of an agile brave would be seen above the crown of the sheltering rock, but it would be folly to waste ammunition on such a will-o'-the-wisp target.

The worst of the matter was that all this time the dodging foes were gradually drawing their ring closer and closer around the three whites.

Every time a flitting copper-colored figure flashed across a little opening, to disappear again behind other shelter, it was shortening by just so much the distance separating the two hostile parties.

Arrows were beginning to hurtle past their heads, too, as some of the red men found opportunities to use their bows. That none of the palefaces had thus far been struck was more a matter of good luck than anything else.

Mayhew did not mean to stand there and wait for the coming of all those skulking warriors. He knew that there must be a score of them, all told, and, should it come to a hand-to-hand combat he and his young companions would have but a sorry chance to hold their own, much less be victors in the encounter.

In one direction, alone, could he seem to discover an opening, where for some reason the Indians had failed to cover the ground.

"Follow me, lads, and duck as you run!" he shouted at the top of his voice, at the same time starting off at a furious pace.

Then began a curious race, with the three fugitives jumping from side to side as they ran, hoping in this way to escape being hit by any arrows that might be sent after them.

Some of the Indians halted to make use of their bows, but the main body kept after the three fugitives. If the worst came, of course the whites could suddenly whirl about, and do some execution with their firearms, though Mayhew knew that it would never do to let the pursuers approach so close as to be able to hurl their stone-headed tomahawks, with which they could split a willow wand, if placed against a tree, at twenty paces.

Mayhew figured that they would be able to reach the spot he had picked out for a stand, if nothing happened to upset his plans. Once there, if they poured a deadly volley in among their pursuers, and followed that up with a second from their small arms, the Indians might become demoralized.

It might have worked as he hoped, but the chances were that the Indians would have immediately dodged, and in this way escaped the full effect of the bombardment. Then, when the firearms were empty, they would push their advantage, and numbers must surely tell.

The yells were still rising discordantly behind them, when Dick began to notice a decided change to their intonation. What had before seemed only an outbreak of savage rage now

had turned to wonder, and even deadly fear.

There was also something else that caused the boy to turn his head, in order to cast a backward look. No sooner had he done this than Dick came to a full stop, his loud shouts attracting the attention of his two companions, and causing them to copy his example.

No longer were the eager Indian braves chasing madly after their intended quarry; on the contrary, each and every warrior seemed bent on running like mad in the opposite direction, as though pursued by a legion of evil spirits.

To the whites there was no mystery in regard to the fright of the ignorant and superstitious Blackfoot braves, for before them they saw a mighty column of steaming water gushing fully a hundred feet up into the air, to descend in an imposing flood. As if an unseen hand had directed it, the giant geyser had spouted just in time to come between the hostile Indians and their intended victims!



“BEFORE THEM THEY SAW A MIGHTY COLUMN OF STEAMING
WATER”

CHAPTER XIII

DEEPER INTO THE WONDERLAND

“OH! it must all be true, Dick!”

These words burst from Roger's lips as he stood gazing at the wonderful sight. Of course he referred to the strange tales which they had heard from some of the Mandans, and which also passed current among the frontiersmen connected with the expedition.

Dick was hardly less staggered than his cousin, and, as for Mayhew, he had the look of one who believed himself face to face with the spirit world.

As they shrank back and watched the amazing fountain pour its flood toward the sky, and heard the thunder of the falling water, strange thoughts flitted through their minds.

“Look, Dick, it's slackening now!” cried Roger, presently, though he had to exercise his vocal cords considerably in order to make himself heard above the tumult of the gushing geyser.

“Yes, I believe it is about to stop!” echoed

the other boy, not without perceptible relief in his tones.

All at once they realized that the flow of steaming water had ended as abruptly as it had begun. The pool was still agitated at the spot where the base of the pillar of water had been located, but the terrible geyser had ceased to flow. (Note 3.)

By degrees the two boys began to recover from the stagnation of mind and body into which they had been thrown.

"Come, the danger seems to be past,—for the present, at least," remarked Dick; "let us look into this thing while we have the chance."

"Just as you say," replied Roger, eagerly. "After this, when any one speaks of these unbelievable things, we can tell what we have seen with our own eyes; and how we were saved from the Indian attack by that fountain of hot water."

With considerable uneasiness, however, the two approached the spot where the base of the water-spout had been. As for Mayhew, nothing could tempt him to advance a single step. Indeed, he shook his head several times in a doubtful fashion, as though he believed it the height of folly for the others to take their lives in their hands in such a reckless way.

“Why, there’s a hole in the solid rock, Dick, and it all came out of that!” Roger exclaimed, after they had drawn close enough to be able to see.

“It had to come from some sort of cavity, of course,” remarked Dick, “and that hole is the place. I think it must ascend once in so often, for here is a regular runway where the water passes off. And to think that this same thing may have been going on for years!”

They listened to ascertain whether they could detect any sign of a great disturbance down in the aperture, but without very much success. Now that it was all over, the boys began to regain their courage, which had in fact been greatly shaken by the gushing of the mighty geyser.

“The Indians have all fled, which is one comfort,” observed Roger, presently.

“Yes, it was too much for them,” added his companion. “They believe these things are caused by the Evil Spirit that dwells inside the earth, and that he must have been angry at them because they tried to capture or kill us.”

“As usual, we have been lucky; when even the water-spouts stand back of us, what have we to fear?”

“But now that all is quiet, the Indians may pluck up courage enough to return,” Dick suggested. “We must not take too many chances by staying here. Another time the water might not come in time to save us.”

“I would like to stay long enough to watch it rise again,” Roger objected; “but then you are right, and it would be folly. There may be others like this in this Wonderland. If half the Indians tell is true, we have many more things to see that will make us open our eyes. I am ready to believe almost anything after this.”

“Watch Mayhew, Roger, and you will see that we cannot get away from here any too soon to suit him.”

“No, he keeps standing first on one foot and then on the other, while he looks to the right and left. I really think he has already picked out which way he will run if it should break loose again.”

“And neither of us can blame him,” added Dick, “for you know that most of his life he has associated only with Indians, and such rough men of the border as ignorant fur-takers and half-breeds. He thinks about the same as they do about all things hard to understand, and that spirits can come back after death. Our mothers

taught us differently, but we should not condemn those who do not know any better."

"He is a brave man, and he means to stand with us to the end," said Roger. "Only for that he would have run away as swiftly as the Indians did. But, Dick, do you believe this was the cause of that heavy rumbling we heard some time back?"

"I couldn't say. It may have been, for you remember that the noise seemed to come and go, at intervals."

"And the trembling of the rocks under our feet, too! That must have been caused by something like this. The hot spring where we said we could have cooked an egg, or made our tea, that may have been the overflow from here, or another fountain like it."

"All we know is that those stories told by the Indians had a foundation in fact. And yet, most people will believe we have simply imagined these things when we tell them what we have seen and heard."

"Yes," sighed Roger, "I only wish there was some way to show them. Seeing is believing, mother always says."

But unfortunately this all happened early in the nineteenth century, and the camera, by which

those amazing geysers might have been caught in action, and displayed to people at the other side of the world, had not even taken form in the brain of the most advanced inventor.

Slowly the lads walked back to where the guide awaited their coming. Mayhew looked relieved when they rejoined him. Apparently he had been dubious as to whether they would be allowed to return; he may even have suspected that the angry gods who sent that gushing fountain soaring two hundred feet into the air might stretch out their arms and drag the lads into the yawning crater, to be served as a sacrifice.

Which way to head now was rather a difficult question to answer. If it were left entirely to the discretion of Mayhew, Dick feared the guide might take it into his head to veer around and start back toward the camp, believing that in so doing he would be serving the interests of the boys best by possibly saving their lives.

Consequently Dick meant to keep his hand on the helm, and do most of the directing. Captain Clark had instructed the guide to put himself entirely at the disposal of the boys, so that in reality it was Dick's place to do the ordering.

Looking around them, it was hard to tell which way they had better go. Everything was so

strange that although, of course, they knew the points of the compass, and in a general way could understand that they must have come in from the east, still who could say whether the beckoning west was their wisest goal, or some other direction?

“We had better try to keep on, and find that valley toward which Jasper Williams was headed,” urged Dick, after they had consulted. “He is a stubborn man in his way, and, even though deserted by both his companions, I believe he would push straight on, so that he might boast of having reached the place he started for.”

“And if the Blackfeet have failed to capture or kill him,” ventured Roger, “we may find him there—of course granting that we reach that Happy Valley ourselves.”

That point having been decided, they started. It was not long, however, before they began to realize that amidst those remarkable cones and thickets and rocky defiles it was a most difficult thing to keep their bearings.

“It seems as though we had come over this part of the ground before,” admitted Dick, “for familiar objects turn up on every hand; and yet how can that be when we have kept going

straight into the northwest for nearly an hour now?"

"There is something wrong about it all, I'm afraid, boys," declared the guide, with a distrustful shrug of his broad shoulders. "I'm thinking we will meet with some queer experiences before we see another sunrise. As for myself, I am wondering whether any of us will get through it alive."

It was not the hostile Indians that caused Mayhew to say this, nor yet the fact that all sorts of wild beasts doubtless roamed these wild places by night. He was accustomed to taking his chances with such ordinary perils, and scorned them as a true-hearted borderer must. But, deep down in his honest heart, Mayhew feared the supernatural. What he could not understand stood for something dreadful, that sent the cold chill of apprehension up and down his backbone.

"Listen, there is the spouting water at it again!" exclaimed Roger.

True enough, they could catch a deep-throated rumbling sound that seemed to make the very atmosphere vibrate. But Dick immediately made a discovery which he voiced in excited words:

“If that be so,” he told them, “what miracle is this; for we surely hear that sound ahead of us, and all this while we have been in the belief that the great water-spout lay back yonder toward the east!”

That afforded Mayhew another opportunity to look worried.

“It’s black magic, that’s what I believe. The east has become the west! We have all been turned around, and right now I cannot say which way I am looking, although I can see the sun hanging up there above that glittering peak.”

“Dick, what can it mean?” demanded Roger, uneasily.

“I can think of but one explanation!” declared the other, steadily. “That is not the same spouting water we heard just now! You remember that we decided there might be others of the same kind in this country of wonders.”

It almost seemed as though nature took delight in proving the accuracy of Dick Armstrong’s surmise; for, hardly had he said this, than they heard once again the remarkable throb of rushing waters pouring forth from a fissure in the crust of the earth and, what was more, it came from some point toward the rear!

Roger smiled faintly, while even Mayhew condescended to let some of the worried look pass away from his face.

"I should not like to roam about this terrible country after nightfall," said Roger, shuddering; "for there is too much danger of stepping into some bottomless pit, or having a deluge of boiling water thrown over your head. It's a question up here in the winter-time whether you are going to be frozen to death in a bitter storm, or roasted by the fires that are under the earth. I think we must be getting pretty close to where the Evil One lives, Dick. His workshop may be around these hills, for all we know."

Dick, however, shook his head. He was proof against all belief in the supernatural. Such wonders as had been encountered on the trip he felt sure were after all but the products of an eccentric nature. Though they might strike one as bewildering at first, familiarity would dull this feeling of amazement, though it could never breed contempt.

"We have a short time still before the sun sinks," remarked Dick; "shall we go on further or spend the night here?"

"I'd rather find a better place if it's the same to you," Roger started to say, when to his as-

tonishment Dick suddenly clutched him by the arm, and started to drag him away.

At the same moment Roger became aware of a peculiar and alarming sound, as though loose rocks and shale were slipping down an abrupt slope.

CHAPTER XIV

THE LANDSLIDE

ROGER tripped over some obstacle, so that both he and Dick fell flat on their faces, though neither had the misfortune to be injured other than to receive minor bruises.

“Why, what happened then?” gasped Roger, as he sat up and commenced to rub one of his elbows.

Mayhew had evidently also leaped hurriedly back, for he was crouching near the two boys, staring fixedly at some point just beyond, and looking not only puzzled but deeply concerned.

“There was some sort of slip in the rock at the edge of that hole,” explained Dick, breathing hard after his sudden exertion. “I was afraid the whole platform might be about to fall into the abyss, and that was why I dragged you back. It was better to be on the safe side, you know.”

“What will cross our path next, I wonder?” grumbled Roger. “We seem to be jumping

from the frying pan into the fire. First it is Indians who are about to wipe us out; then we come near being boiled in a pyramid of steaming water, and, as if that were not enough, here we have a narrow escape from being dropped into a bottomless pit."

"It's nip and tuck which sort of end will get us sooner or later," remarked Mayhew soberly; almost as though he had made up his mind that there was no use of resisting his manifest destiny.

"Let's get away from this horrible place as soon as we can, Dick," urged Roger. "As to spending the night here, you will have to excuse me! We had better shoulder our packs and—oh! where are they, Dick? I am sure I laid mine down at the time we stopped to take a look around."

Dick looked deeply worried.

"Yes, the three of us did the same thing. As you say, they have disappeared, and I fear we have lost our blankets and provisions and extra ammunition."

His words created a panic in the breast of his comrade, for Roger scrambled to his feet from his knees, clutching the sleeve of Dick's deer-skin hunting tunic, and crying out:

"Oh! can it be possible that they were carried down with that avalanche when the slip occurred? And do you think we can recover them again?"

"I hope so," replied the other lad, soberly, "for it will be a serious thing for us if we lose all we had in those packs. But we must be careful how we approach the edge, if it crumbles so easily. We would not care to be carried after our blankets, riding an avalanche!"

Cautiously picking their way, they finally managed to creep to where they could look down into the yawning abyss. It filled them with awe and despair. So far as they could see the walls were almost perpendicular, and extended far beyond their limited range of vision.

"We could never get down there alive," Roger confessed, as he looked shudderingly into the chasm that had swallowed up their valued possessions. "And I am afraid we have seen the last of those blankets."

"Of course," said the other, consolingly, "once we return to the camp we can obtain warm furs from the Indians, that will take their place for sleeping purposes."

"But what are we to do now," reasoned Roger, "far away from the Mandan village, and

so situated that we dare not build a camp fire at night, no matter how bitter cold it turns?"

"That is a hard question for me to answer," Dick admitted, candidly. "If it comes to the worst, of course we can turn back, and give over our hunt for Jasper Williams. If he should change his mind and return to the camp all would be well. On the other hand, if he stayed out the main part of the winter, or the Indians were holding him a prisoner, we would stand to lose all we had won."

"And our dear parents must see their homes taken away from them by that rascally Lascelles," groaned Roger, grinding his teeth in his distress. "Dick, sooner than allow that, I would try to stay out here all winter, taking my chances with the wolves, the Indians, and these terrible things that surround us on every side."

"Remember our old motto, Roger, that carried us through so many troubles in the past—never despair, no matter how black the skies look. We will come out on top yet,—we *must*!"

"Do you think that awful hole can have any bottom, Dick?"

For answer the other dropped a large bit of rock, being careful to cast it far out from the wall underneath them.

It seemed a long time before they believed they caught the faintest kind of sound away down in the black depths.

"Why, it must be nearly half a mile deep!" cried the astonished Roger. "We can never hope to see our things again, for a fact."

"I'm afraid that's the truth," admitted Dick. "It is a great misfortune, but we must face it bravely. 'There are more ways than one to skin a cat,' you know Jasper used to say; and, while things look dark for us just now, we can find a way out, never fear."

They backed away carefully, not wishing to start another slide that might carry them down to keep company with the lost outfit. At least they had their guns, and a fair stock of ammunition to fall back on. Besides this they were warmly dressed, and able to resist to some extent the attack of the wintry winds.

Dick brought this to the attention of his companions as they trudged onward. He was always finding some reason for plucking up hope; conditions, according to Dick's healthy mind, were never so bad but that they might be worse.

Some time later they drew up, Mayhew suggesting that they could hardly find a better place to spend the night than where they were.

A small stream ran past, and it was cold water, too, as they soon discovered.

"Trout in it!" Mayhew announced, as though he had something on his mind, "and if you say the word, I think I can get a few of them. The season is late; but, since winter is still holding off, they may bite at a bait."

"It would be a good idea," returned Dick, "since we have lost all our supplies we will have to get food by all sorts of means. Our guns should bring us in game, if only we dare fire them. Yes, try the fishing, Mayhew, and good luck to you."

The guide had some hooks with him, for he always went prepared to provide himself with a tasty meal from a convenient stream, being very fond of fish. He also found some fragments of meat with which to bait his hooks. While the others were making ready to start a small flame in a depression, where it could not betray them to lurking enemies, Mayhew began his angling.

Fortunately for the little party the trout were both hungry and guileless. They had never had any acquaintance with such a thing as a fish-hook. Perhaps, once in a long time, some passing Indian brave may have used his primi-

tive fish spear in order to secure a meal, but this had failed to educate them in the wiles of the human race.

And so it came about that presently Mayhew proudly exhibited a beautiful trout that, being freshly caught, seemed to glow with all the colors of the rainbow.

“Two more like it would make us all a fine meal,” said Dick, as he surveyed the prize.

“I can get them, never fear, unless my cunning has deserted me,” the guide told him, confidently.

It proved that his boast was good, since a second fish was soon taken, although they had to wait until almost dark before a third came to hook.

Meanwhile Roger had prepared the two already captured, and they were all soon being held over the red coals lying in the hole that served as a fireplace. Such experienced woodsmen as the adventurers were knew how to cook meat and fish without any necessity for a frying-pan. Nor would they miss salt with which to season it. A sharp appetite takes the place of these things in the woods.

Perhaps all of them could have eaten more had they been given a chance; for, although the

trout had been of unusual size, they seemed to disappear most miraculously, once the hungry campers started in to make their supper.

This duty done, they faced another dilemma. How were they to keep warm as they slept? Accustomed to snuggling down inside their blankets when the wind whistled, it was not the nicest outlook to face a night in the open, with no protection from the chilly air.

The worst of it was that they could not build a roaring fire to warm them. Had that been possible, no one could have found any reason for complaint; but it would be next door to madness, in the estimation of the borderman, to have attempted it, with those hostiles not far away, and ready to creep upon them as they slept.

Dick noted the rising wind with uneasiness. It was gradually swinging around so as to come out of the northwest, too, and that was the point where the wintry storms came from. When a gale blew from that quarter, with a sting in its breath, wise people kept to their cabins, and declined to venture forth until the worst had passed.

What would become of them should they be caught in this open camp, without any fire, and

destitute of robes or blankets? Dick expected to hear Roger make some remark bearing on this matter, at any moment now; for he knew the other must be beginning to shiver as he sat in uncomfortable silence, evidently brooding over the many troubles by which they were confronted, and trying to see a way out.

Mayhew was prowling about close by. It was not pitch dark, though one must possess good eyes in order to see with any degree of accuracy.

"He's looking to see if we can better our condition," thought Dick, when he had watched the guide examining a pile of rocks in the immediate vicinity that may have been heaped up for some purpose by Indians, years and years before.

Apparently Mayhew was not finding much encouragement in his search, for Dick could hear him muttering rather disconsolately to himself, though he did not seem disposed to give up entirely, being possessed of a stubborn nature.

Soon Roger was rubbing his hands one over the other, which indicated that he felt the cold. Dick's mental figuring had produced results, and he believed a proposition he meant to offer would strike the others favorably. He was

only waiting for Roger to open the subject.

Presently Roger got up on his feet and commenced to thresh both arms back and forth. It has always been known as a good means for starting circulation when the blood is chilled from inaction; though Roger could not obtain the best results on account of having to refrain from making any more noise than was absolutely necessary.

Dick thought the time had arrived to make his suggestion. The wind was blowing strongly by them, with every prospect of a still further increase in velocity. If it kept up throughout the night the dawn would turn out to be bitterly cold; and, unless they were able to find shelter, they might perish.

“This is an exposed camp, don’t you think, Roger?” he began.

“Yes, and unless we can have a fire I hate to think what will happen to us before another day comes around,” the other replied.

“Then we must make a change,” Dick told him.

“That is easy to say, but where can we go that would be better?”

“I know a place,” came the confident reply, “so get ready to go with me, both of you.”

CHAPTER XV

SHELTER FROM THE BITING NORTH WIND

"I AM glad to hear you say that, Dick; you always have some good news when it gets bleak and black. And from the way I'm shivering I think the sooner we make a move the better."

Mayhew had also heard the proposal with interest. Unfruitful though his own search had proved, the news that one of the boys had made some sort of discovery likely to benefit them sounded good to him.

"Where are going, Dick?" asked Roger, after they had started. "Unless I'm mistaken we seem to be on the back trail."

"Where else could I take you, except to some place I had seen before?" demanded the new guide. "But I know you must want to hear about it, so listen. As we came along I happened to notice what looked like the mouth of a cave. If it should turn out that way we can find shelter within. It might even be possible for us to light a fire there."

“Caves are all right on a bad night, too,” assented Roger. “We know, for haven’t we made use of one when overtaken by a storm? I only hope it turns out to be something besides a little hole in the side of the hill.”

“I have hopes that it will prove to be much better than that.”

“Is it far away?” continued the other, a little uneasily, for after their late bitter experience, when the earth slide robbed them of their packs, Roger had come to eye their surroundings with considerable suspicion, and did not much fancy prowling around there in the darkness.

“Only a few minutes’ walk,” Dick assured him. “I want to make sure that we do not pass it by, that is all.”

He devoted himself to the task of keeping track of the trail as they made their way along. Even Roger used his eyes the best he knew how, hoping that he might be of some assistance.

“Here it is!” he was glad to hear Dick say, presently.

Both the others surveyed the spot with considerable interest. The rock formation was peculiar in many ways. It looked as though at some remote period, when the continent was in process of formation, upheavals had forced

numerous minor ridges of stone to assume the shape of "hogbacks," as Mayhew called them.

It was toward one of these that Dick now pointed. Looking closely, Roger fancied he could just detect what looked like a dark spot near its base. He knew then that Dick must have noted some other land-mark in order to find the place. No doubt the habit of observation which the young pioneer cultivated, much as modern Boy Scouts are taught to do in these days, had come in handy again, as he had often known it to do in the past.

They pushed closer. There was an opening without any doubt. Just what it led to, of course none of them could more than guess; but they had hopes.

"One thing let us notice," ventured Roger. "Here is a dead tree, and if we find it possible to build a fire inside we know where to come for fuel."

"Good for you, Roger," the other lad hastened to say. "And now to try and find out what awaits us here."

Dick insisted on being the leader. The discovery had been all his, and it was therefore up to him to be the guide.

On hands and knees Dick crept carefully into

the hole. He held his gun in such a way that if it became necessary he could make quick use of it. So far as he knew there was no peril hanging over their heads; but it always pays to be ready.

Their progress was very slow, because they had to grope their way along. Dick put out a hand and felt of the rock before trusting himself to advance. He had no desire to find himself whirling through space, after the manner of their lost packs, in case an unseen abyss yawned in front of him.

This went on for several minutes. They had pushed some little distance into the gaping aperture, and so far as could be ascertained there was as yet no limit to the cave.

Dick arrived at the conclusion that they had gone far enough to admit of a change in their method of procedure.

"I am going to strike a light, so keep still, please, both of you," he announced.

Dick was always prepared for anything like this. His tinder, flint and steel were handy, and he even had a small piece of tallow dip that hardly deserved the name of candle, but which had a wick, and would give out a faint glow if ignited.

To the boy of to-day this awkward means of producing a light would have presented almost insurmountable difficulties, and ultimate success might well be hailed as a wonderful feat. To the pioneer lads it was of such daily occurrence that they thought nothing of accomplishing it.

In a very brief period of time Dick had clipped his flint and steel together so as to send a shower of sparks into the tiny bit of inflammable tinder, which began to smolder. This was blown until it flamed up, when the wick of his tallow candle-end was thrust into the blaze.

Looking around after they had obtained this sorry means of illumination, the intruders could see that they were in a good-sized cave. Ahead of them lay more dense gloom, which would seem to indicate that the aperture amidst the rocks extended for an unknown distance beyond.

“Well, this is a pretty good place to put in the night, when it’s getting cold enough out there to freeze your toes,” said Roger.

“It’s really comfortable in here,” agreed Mayhew.

“That’s because the rock is warm, if you

have thought to notice it," Dick explained.

"Now that you mention it," remarked Roger, as he again dropped on all fours to find out for himself, "I see it is a fact. Queer that I didn't seem to notice it before. We really need no fire here, except that this darkness could almost be cut with a knife."

"No danger, that I can see, of the light being observed out there," Mayhew told them, thus proving that he, too, was much in favor of adding to their comfort, if it was to be accomplished at such a trifling expenditure of time and labor.

"Shall I crawl out and fetch in some of that wood, Dick?" asked Roger, and there was such pleading in his voice and manner that Dick could not have refused him, even had he wanted to.

Accordingly Roger crawled away. Since there was a dim light in the cave he did not find it so difficult to make his way toward the exit. Later on he came back, with his arms full of fuel.

"You get the fire started where you think best, Dick, while I make another trip for a second lot. We could keep ten fires supplied, and not use half the supply outside."

"Could you see our light out there?" asked Dick.

"Not a thing," replied Roger. "The fact is, I had to do half of my crawling in the dark, and only got the first glimpse of the light after I was pretty well inside."

That took away the last doubt Dick may have been entertaining with regard to the wisdom of having a fire.

"It will be easier for you the next time, if I get things going," he told the fuel gatherer.

Mayhew, as though feeling that he ought to have a share in the labor, this time followed the boy out of the cave, and also picked up a load of the scattered wood. The tree must have been struck by lightning at some time in the past, since the branches covered so much ground.

Dick had the fire well started by the time the others returned. They could see the light plainly after passing the mouth of the cave, although there seemed so little chance of it betraying their presence that it was hardly worth considering.

How different things looked, with that cheery blaze going! The gloom seemed much further removed than before. And, like the careful boy that he was, Dick had extinguished his precious

candle-end as soon as its faint light was no longer needed. Time might yet make that worth its weight in gold to him, since its like could only be obtained in some settlement.

An hour later Dick, wishing to find out how the wind-storm might be progressing, made his way to the opening and passed out. When he returned he reported that the stars were still shining, and it was getting very cold; as for the wind, it continued to roar across the open country furiously, now coming out of the north.

“And let me tell you,” he wound up by saying, “I builded better than I knew at the time I happened to notice this cave mouth. In here it is so comfortable one finds it hard to believe the cold is so intense outside.”

“For folks who have no blankets a cave is a very fine thing, I must say,” was Roger’s comment.

Of course, almost all of their conversation was connected with the immediate past, and the hope they entertained concerning a successful termination of their hunt for Jasper Williams.

“You did not see anything to tell you the Indians might be camped near here, I suppose, Dick?” Roger asked, as the other took his place once more near the fire.

"No, although I looked in every direction," was the reply. "There is a strange light over toward the west. You can see it in the sky. I do not know how to describe it, except that once, when the forest was afire down on the Missouri, we saw the same reflection. It may be there is a prairie burning somewhere down that way. It would be a fearful sight, I should think."

"And picture the buffalo, and the deer, and everything that runs, fleeing from the flames!" added Roger, who possessed a lively imagination. "I heard one of our men by the name of Fields tell about the time he was caught in such a fire when far out on the open prairie, hunting buffalo, and what a narrow escape he had."

"Yes, I remember what a strange thing he did to escape being burned to death," Mayhew continued. "It seems that, as running was out of the question, and the wall of fire was rushing toward him, Fields discovered a little hollow in the surface of the prairie. Into that he crawled, first dragging the buffalo he had just slain so that it would cover his body, and serve as a shield against the passing fire."

"And did he escape without being badly burned?" asked Dick, deeply interested, since

it happened that he had never heard this story before.

“Nothing worth mentioning, he told me,” the guide continued. “Few men would have been so wise as to think of such a thing; but then Fields is as bright as a button. They say you can never catch a weasel asleep, and I expect that would apply to him just as well.”

This man, whom they were talking about, was one of those whose names have been inscribed in history on the roll of fame, along with those of Lewis and Clark, for he accompanied them on their wonderful journey through thousands of miles of utterly unknown country, to the far-distant Pacific, and return.

“How can we find a soft place to lie down on, please tell me, Dick?” Roger asked, a little while later, as he ran his hand over the hard rock, and shook his head as though the prospect were not very alluring.

Perhaps Dick meant to reply, even though he could hardly have suggested any amelioration of the conditions; but, he was not given the chance to open his mouth, as it happened, for just then an angry roar sounded close at hand that made Roger suspect one of those terrible water-spouts must be about to overwhelm them.

He saw a bulky object come sweeping toward them from the unexplored interior of the cave, and then scatter the burning brands as it plowed through the little fire.

CHAPTER XVI

THE BATTLE IN THE CAVE

INSTINCTIVELY all of them guessed what the character of the intruder must be. The terrible roar, and the glimpse they obtained of the great hairy body ere the fire was scattered right and left betrayed it.

“A bear!” cried Roger, voicing the discovery of his companions as well as his own.

All was confusion. Mayhew had been rather unfortunate, for he chanced to be partly in the way of the onrushing beast as it made straight for the fire, the presence of which in its den must have aroused its anger.

He was just in the act of scrambling to his feet when he was struck by the beast's huge body, and was bowled over just as you may have seen a pin hit by a speeding ball in the alley.

Dick had somehow managed to snatch up his gun when he gained his knees. The place was now almost in darkness, since the burning brands had been scattered far and wide. The

body of the infuriated animal was so bulky, however, that he could not fail to discern its outlines against the wall, where a still flickering brand chanced to lie.

The boy knew that it was no time for hesitation. No matter what had caused the animal to attack them, and even though the fire had been the first object of its rage, those who were responsible for the intrusion must come next on the list.

He thrust the long-barreled gun straight out, and, without waiting to rest the butt against his shoulder, pulled the trigger as soon as he felt the muzzle strike something yielding.

There was a muffled roar as the rifle was discharged. Dick, with the hunter instinct, instantly threw himself aside, anticipating that the wounded bear would turn upon him for revenge.

His shot had apparently not been a fatal one, though it brought another of those dreadful roars from the occupant of the cave; and now, since it was impossible for him to reload his gun unless given time, he would have to cast it aside and resort to his hunting knife.

Roger had not quite lost his senses, although the abruptness of the attack must have bewil-

dered the boy. When he threw himself back out of the way he somehow missed connection with his gun. That it was ever in his mind was proved by the frantic way in which he instantly started to grope about on the bare rock near his feet, as though in expectation of finding it.

After all, it was the brilliant flash accompanying the discharge of Dick's gun that showed Roger his own weapon. He quickly seized it, and then turned to deliver his fire.

All this was taking place in much less time than it takes to read it. The bear was certainly in deadly earnest, and evidently meant to complete the job that had been undertaken with such fury.

Roger saw his chance to shoot, and was not neglectful of it. One experience with a monster of this type had shown him the necessity for sending his bullet to some vital spot, for he knew that a wounded grizzly would never turn tail and run.

A kind fortune must have guided the shot, for, beyond a doubt, had it failed in its mission, the fate of the boys would have been settled. Shut up there in a cave in contact with a savage bear, armed with claws an inch in length,

and rendered wild with pain, they would have had but small chance of escape.

With the muffled discharge of Roger's rifle the beast staggered, and then fell with a crash. Dick was trying to get a charge of powder into the barrel of his gun, though his hands trembled so that it was a next to impossible undertaking.

It happened that just then his foot struck against some object, and, filled with a wild hope, he bent down to ascertain what it could be. When he found that he had come upon Mayhew's gun, Dick was ready to shout with joy, for he knew that, if Roger's shot had failed, there was still another chance.

There was no need of further exertions, it proved. The two shots, delivered at such close range, had completed the work, for the monster lay still upon the floor of the cave. A smell of burning hair caused Dick to pluck one of the still blazing fagots away, which, with presence of mind, he immediately utilized for starting a fresh fire. (Note 4.)

Mayhew was discovered, sitting up and looking somewhat dazed. He had a lump on his head where it had come in contact with the rock at the time the rush of the bear had thrown

him aside; but, on the whole, they felt that they could congratulate themselves that things were no worse.

Of course the first thing the boys did was to reload their weapons. If there was one bear in the cave there might be a mate, and it was certainly the part of wisdom for them to be in readiness to defend themselves to the utmost.

After the fire had been revived, the guns placed in a condition for service, and Mayhew's injuries looked after in a way that, crude as it might be, satisfied him, they began to figure out how it all came about.

"Then this is a bear's den, after all!" Roger commenced; "yet not one of us ever thought of such a thing, did we?"

"I saw nothing that would tell it," admitted Mayhew, "and, if the beast was in the habit of coming in by way of the opening that we used we would have known it. A bear's den always has a smell that you will notice as soon as you enter; that has been my experience in all my hunting, and I've run across a few."

"Then there must be another entrance more convenient to the hunting grounds of the bear," Dick observed. "The beast may not have been in its den when we arrived. Coming along,

just a little while ago, our fire attracted attention, and then the discovery of human beings here rendered it furious."

"It beats anything I ever met with," commented Mayhew. "No black bear would ever dash upon a fire unless first terribly wounded. But this beast was as wild as if we had been filling her hide with lead."

"All we have been hearing from the Indians and the French trappers about these silver-tip bears of the mountains seems to be true," remarked Dick.

"They are fearful enemies," said Roger. "We have been lucky to kill the two we have met; but, if a shot should fail, the hunter would never escape being torn into ribbons."

He took up one of the immense paws of the dead beast as he spoke, and exhibited the claws that decorated it. They were terrible enough to send a shudder through the bravest heart, especially when one considered the titanic strength possessed by the steel muscles of the animal.

"Well," ventured Dick, "it turns out that there is danger hovering over those who invade this strange country, even when they believe themselves securely quartered in a cave!"

“But I hope this little adventure is not going to make us think of leaving here, to spend the night under the stars, and in the cold wind?” Roger hinted, a little fearful lest his comrade should consider this the wisest policy.

Dick could plainly see what was worrying the other, and he hastened to set Roger’s fears at rest.

“If we have to choose between two evils,” he said, “we might as well take the lesser. We know what we can expect out there. That wind is as keen as the edge of my buckhorn hunting knife, and would go through us long before morning. And, after all, there may be only one bear. How about that, Mayhew?”

“If you asked my opinion, I would say here by all means,” replied the wood ranger, immediately. “We can take watch and watch, and be on our guard through the night.”

Roger drew a breath of relief.

“That would be much better than freezing half to death outside!” he exclaimed; “and you can count on me to take my regular turn. But, Dick, one thing is sure—we must not let our fire go out while we stay here.”

“That would be only the part of wisdom,” Dick decided, “and, while we have the chance,

perhaps we'd better fetch in plenty of wood now. The night is long, and a fire eats up a lot of fuel."

This they set about doing without delay. Mayhew, feeling a little dizzy after his rough experience with the onrushing bear, was told to stand guard while the boys looked after the wood supply. It might have been noticed, however, that both of them slung their guns over their backs by means of the straps used for this purpose. Evidently they did not mean to be caught napping, and if by chance they encountered the mate of the slain bear while laying in a supply of fuel they wanted to be in condition to give him a warm reception.

But nothing happened. If there was a second bear he must have been far away from his den on that night, for he failed to disturb the peace of the explorers' camp.

The plan of keeping watch by turns worked splendidly, and there was not a single minute that one pair of eyes did not remain on the alert for danger, while two of the party slept.

Hours crept on, and Dick, who had taken his turn for the second time, believed it must be drawing close to dawn outside. Roger and the borderman were sleeping by the fire. Hard

though their beds may have been, they were accustomed to roughing it, and not a murmur had been heard. A piece of wood served for a pillow, and in that warm shelter they needed no covering.

Creeping to the exit Dick took an observation. He found it was indeed daylight, and that the wind had died down with the coming of the sun, though the air still felt pretty cold to him, especially after having been in so snug a retreat for many hours.

It was really time they were up and doing. The future did not look very promising. They would have to run the risk of firing their guns, so as to secure fresh meat, for they must eat to live. And somewhere within a radius of ten or twelve miles Jasper Williams might be found, either in a camp of his own, or as a prisoner of the hostile Indians.

If ever Dick Armstrong had cause to call upon his resolute and hopeful heart it was when he faced such a dismal outlook. Never once did he falter. His lips were firmly pressed together, and on his sunburned face there rested a look of determination that no amount of difficulties could dissipate.

He immediately awoke the others.

“The dawn has come, and we must be on the move!” he announced.

No one uttered a complaint. Roger had, before going to sleep, managed to remove the terrible claws of the dead grizzly. That would be the only token they could show as evidence of the truth of their story concerning the night attack, and the fight in the cave.

So they issued forth, shivering at first when the cold air struck them.

“Good-by, old cave,” said Roger, waving his hand back toward the small black hole amidst the rocks, the discovery of which had added so much to their comfort; “we will never forget you as long as we live. A bear’s den may be a queer place to spend a night in; but when it happens to be a bitter cold night it might be a whole lot worse.”

They took up the work in earnest, and as all of them were exceedingly hungry, their first duty was to secure food. Of course, they might have food for several days, if they cared to use the carcass of the dead grizzly, but the meat was so tough and coarse that, after one trial at making a breakfast of grizzly steak, they all agreed that they would rather rely on the chance of obtaining more palatable food.

If they could only run across a deer it would supply them with all the meat they wanted for several days, and, although they realized the danger of discharging their guns while the hostile Blackfeet were in the vicinity, they were willing to run that risk.

CHAPTER XVII

THANKS TO THE WOLF PACK

“WHAT have you on your mind now, Roger?” asked Dick, realizing how serious his companion had become.

As a rule Roger was a light-hearted boy, so that the change was all the more noticeable whenever he devoted himself to evolving some idea that had occurred to him.

“Oh, I was only thinking how easy it would be to get all the fresh meat we needed if only we could stay in one place,” was his reply.

“What sort of fresh meat do you mean?” continued the other.

“Four different times now,” explained Roger, “I have seen those big jack-rabbits jump out of some copse, or a crack in the rocks, and bound away. Each time, just from force of habit, my gun would fly to my shoulder, and I found myself covering the jumper; but of course I did not mean to pull the trigger.”

“No, because our ammunition is scanty, and, if we have to fire a shot, we should bag some-

thing larger than a rabbit. But, Roger, please go on and explain what you mean."

"Only this," the other added; "we could easily make traps, and snare some of these fat rabbits if we were in camp. Keeping on as we do, that's out of the question. So, in the end, I suppose we must use our guns to bring down a deer, or a buffalo, if we have the good luck to run across one."

Mayhew came to a full stop just then.

"There is something coming this way!" he announced.

"It sounds to me as though it was a pack of excited dogs, or wolves in chase of a breakfast," said Roger, after listening a moment.

Dick nodded his head in a fashion that told that he was of the same opinion. Indeed, as the sounds were constantly growing louder, there could be little doubt concerning their origin. The snapping yelps of wolves in full cry, once heard, cannot again be easily mistaken. There is a thrilling import to the sound that goes through one like a galvanic shock.

"They must be chasing a deer," Roger hazarded.

"Yes, and heading straight this way!" added Mayhew.

"Perhaps this is the chance we have been waiting for," ventured Roger, as he handled his gun eagerly.

"No harm done in getting ready, that I can see," observed Dick, sagely.

"Let us spread out just a little," suggested Mayhew, who, being a veteran hunter, knew all about the habits of wolves when in pursuit of their quarry.

"Yes, I like that idea," agreed Dick, "for they may pass to the right or the left, and then the one on that side would get a fair shot. Remember, Roger, take your stand, and after that be sure not to move. If you did, you might cause the deer to sheer off, and us to lose our breakfast."

Mayhew stood still, while Dick hurried off to the right, and Roger took to the left, though neither of them went more than a hundred feet. In fact the clamor was drawing so close now that at any minute they might expect to catch their first glimpse of the chase.

All of them stood like statues, their eyes riveted on the quarter whence the wild yelps arose. They could hear the rush of something moving swiftly through the brush, and the sound grew constantly in volume.

Suddenly a running animal came into view, a lordly elk, Dick instantly discovered, and a buck at that. From the manner in which he ran it was evident that either the elk was lame, or else had been chased so far that he was becoming exhausted.

Close at his heels came four ferocious gray wolves. They were spinning along at top speed, their red tongues hanging from between their open jaws, where the white teeth gleamed cruelly.

The boys had run across another species of wolf since leaving their old hunting grounds near the mouth of the Missouri. This was the smaller prairie wolf, an animal akin to the coyote. But they saw at a glance that these were the large, gray timber wolves, more to be feared than any other species, especially if they were half starved.

The poor exhausted elk was apparently on his last legs. He seemed to realize this fact, too, for, as the boys waited impatiently for the chase to reach them, they saw him stumble, and fall to his knees, as he turned to face his foes.

Instantly the pack leaped upon him. One was sent whirling through the air, torn by the sharp

antlers of the buck; but the others quickly had the gallant elk down on the ground.

“We must chase them off!” cried Dick, starting on the run toward the spot.

Roger and the guide followed, so that the three of them were running as fast as they could in the direction of the tragedy. They knew how quickly wolves can tear the carcass of their quarry, and realized that, if they hoped to save a portion of the elk’s best quarters, they would have to hasten.

The wolves quickly discovered their presence; but they were also very loath to abandon their feast. Indeed, it seemed for a moment as though they meant to dispute the right of the newcomers to the game their cunning and ferocity had pulled down, for they crouched there, and growled, and bared their teeth as the trio approached.

“Be ready to defend yourself, Roger!” called out Dick, “but do not shoot unless it is absolutely necessary!”

The wolves realized that they must yield up their quarry unless they really meant to fight, which would be foreign to their crafty natures. Doubtless they knew that man was an enemy to be feared, even though he might only be an



“TURNING AROUND FROM TIME TO TIME AS THOUGH HALF
INCLINED TO COME BACK”

Indian brave, armed with his bow and flint-tipped arrows.

They accordingly retreated, though turning around from time to time as though half inclined to come back and have it out with the spoilers of their well won feast.

"We'll give you the leavings, never fear," laughed Roger, when he saw that there was a fair portion of the elk still untouched, from which they could undoubtedly obtain an ample supply of meat. They set to work with a will, and soon had obtained all they thought necessary.

All this occurred while the hungry wolves remained in sight, skulking here and there, sniffing the air in a beseeching manner, and once in a while giving vent to a plaintive howl that sounded strange, indeed, heard in the broad daylight.

No sooner did the three hunters start to leave the spot than the eager animals could be seen turning, their natural sense of caution serving to hold them back, while the pangs of hunger urged them on.

"If there had been more of them," Dick commented, "the chances are we would not have been able to take their meat without a fight."

“Even those four might have tried to scare us off if it was later in the season, when they are half starved,” Mayhew told them. “Just now the wolves are fat after the fall, when hunting is good; that is, fat for their kind. But, when their flanks seem to almost meet, and they are gaunt with hunger, they make a terrible enemy to attack.”

The two lads exchanged glances.

“Yes, we know, for we have been through just such an experience,” said Roger, as he drew back the sleeve of his hunting tunic, to exhibit a long, red scar. “That is something I carry to remind me of the time. I sometimes dream of it, and can see the terrible mob of half-crazy wolves leaping up at my throat, while I did my best to beat them back.”

“If it hadn’t been for the coming of some hunters with their dogs just in the nick of time,” added Dick, “I think both of us would have been pulled down and killed by that pack. It was one of our narrowest escapes.”

“And we have had a good many,” said Roger, smiling as his memory sped back to former scenes.

As all of them were very hungry, their one thought now was to cook some of the hap-

pily-secured meat as soon as it could be arranged.

“Here is as good a place as we can find,” suggested Dick, “and, unless I am mistaken, we will be able to get what wood we want without going far for it.”

“The kind that will make next to no smoke, you mean?” Roger remarked, and the other nodded.

There is a vast amount of difference in wood. Well-seasoned stuff of a certain variety will burn, and give off hardly any smoke; on the other hand, if the fuel is partly green, or obtained from a certain species of tree, it will send up a black column that can be seen a long way off.

When hunters or Indians wish to communicate with each other, even though miles apart, they take this latter kind of wood for their fire; but, when they desire to do some cooking while in the enemy's country, with keen eyes on the watch around them, it is of course necessary to attract as little attention as possible, and on that account the kind of fuel that gives out no betraying smoke is chosen.

Of course this was what Dick and his two companions now did; and also the fire was built

in a depression among the rocks so that it might not be too prominent.

Here they busied themselves cooking small pieces of the elk meat. Their method of doing it was exceedingly primitive, for it was thrust close to the fire by means of long splinters of wood, and turned around until well scorched, when it was devoured with much satisfaction.

It requires a vigorous appetite to really enjoy cooking of this type. Many boys of to-day would turn up their noses at such food, and go hungry for a while, though in the end they might come around and ask for a portion.

They spent half an hour about that small cooking-fire. At the end of this time all admitted that they were satisfied, and could not eat another bite. However, at Dick's suggestion, some more of the elk meat was cooked, to serve them for a "snack" in case circumstances should not allow them to light a fire later on.

It was Dick who always thought of the future. Roger, with his happy-go-lucky ways, was, as a rule, content to consider only present necessities. When he had eaten, and felt satisfied, he did not know why any one should borrow trouble thinking of something far in the future. In fact, he generally took to heart that passage

he had heard his father read from the Good Book at home, "sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof," and applied it to many ordinary occurrences.

After leaving the place where they had enjoyed this good breakfast, of which all of them were in such need, they laid out a course that would take them to a section of the country that they had not as yet visited.

All the time they could hear occasional strange roaring or hissing sounds that aroused the utmost curiosity, for they did not know at what moment they would come upon some new and startling mystery. This enchanted land was apparently the home of innumerable weird sights such as a white man had never before set eyes on; and, as they continued to advance, they were constantly reminded of this fact.

So, when Roger, who was a trifle in the advance, called out that they were face to face with a gigantic "paint pot," the others held their breath as they pushed on to see with their own eyes what he could mean.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE GIANT PAINT POT

It was indeed a sight well calculated to make the boys stare, and rub their eyes in wonder, as though they half believed they must be dreaming. If these wonders of Yellowstone Park elicit cries of delight from tens of thousands of tourists in these modern times, imagine how remarkable they must have seemed to these pioneer lads more than a hundred years ago.

“When you called it a paint pot, Roger, I think you hit the bull’s-eye, for it does look like that, with all those colors boiling up in such a crazy fashion!” Dick presently remarked, breaking the spell that seemed to bind them.

“But what is it made of, I’d like to know?” demanded the puzzled Roger.

“Colored clay, in the shape of mud, that is boiling all the time. Be careful how you put your hand to it. See how the steam keeps on rising. It must be pretty hot stuff!”

“But what makes it boil that way? There must be a fire of some kind deep down in the earth?”

“Nothing else would make all these fountains of hot water, and even the rocks in some places feel warm,” admitted the other lad, who was hardly less amazed than Roger himself.

“It must be some sort of volcano,” Roger continued, thoughtfully. “It has no visible cone, like most of them do, and so the heat escapes in this way through hundreds of little vents.”

That is about the nearest explanation any scientist has ever been able to give why this one region in all the world contains innumerable geysers, hot springs, boiling colored mud pots, and various other wonders of Nature. (Note 5.)

“All I can say is that I don’t blame any poor Injun for believing the place is Evil Ground,” muttered Mayhew, as he stared at the strange spectacle of that blue and yellow and green mud boiling ceaselessly, and throwing off steam that had a peculiar odor, unlike anything they had ever smelled before.

He looked around him, and shrugged his shoulders. So many remarkable things were to be seen, such as a frontiersman might well view with alarm, that it was no wonder Mayhew felt uneasy. Left to his own devices he would have

turned his back on this enchanted region, and considered himself a lucky man if only he might get away with his life.

"It strikes me," Dick observed, "that we need not hope to find Williams anywhere about here, if, as we fear, he has been taken prisoner by those Blackfoot Indians."

"No, because they would never come to a place like this, unless their old medicine man was along to make a palaver with the Evil Spirit," Roger suggested. "That is what I heard a Mandan brave say, and I guess it must be about so. We will have to go further, and look for Jasper elsewhere."

Mayhew seized upon this hint to make a start, and, noticing how anxious the scout seemed to be to shut out the strange spectacle of that ever boiling pool of gayly tinted mud, the boys followed at his heels.

"I can hear other spouting fountains not far away!" declared Roger. "Sometimes it is like a giant snake hissing, and then again I seem to catch a distant but terrible roaring sound, reminding me of that fierce bear in the cave."

"Even if the winter is coming on here, there are plenty of birds still to be met with," Dick

remarked, as a flock of cawing crows started up from a tree-top near by, and flew away.

“Yes, there are hawks also, and I am sure I saw a pair of great bald-headed eagles soaring away up in the sky, wheeling in circles as they rose. Besides, we have stirred up many of those brush fowl that are so much like our chickens at home, and make such fine eating.”

“It would be a great place for a hunter or a trapper to spend the winter,” Mayhew commented, “if only he could get used to the awful things there are going on in this beautiful section of country. You see, the snow must soon melt where there is so much heat; and that keeps the grass green for the deer and the buffalo.”

“Hark!” exclaimed Roger, stopping suddenly.

His face lighted up with eagerness, and Dick was filled with curiosity.

“What did you think you heard?” he asked, presently.

“The signal we want to catch more than anything else,” came the confident reply.

“Not the whistle Jasper Williams taught us to practice, Roger, and which he uses when he wants to communicate with friends?”

“That, and nothing else, Dick. I am sure I

caught it, coming from somewhere over to the right."

"Then why not answer it?" Dick told him.

"Do you think it would be wise?" asked the other.

"We want to know if Jasper Williams is near by, and that is the best way to find it out. You can give the whistle, Roger, for I have heard you practice it many times."

For answer Roger puckered up his lips, and emitted a peculiar little trill. Should any one not familiar with it hear this sound, he would naturally imagine some bird was calling to its mate.

All of them stood there, eagerly waiting to discover if Roger's note called forth any response. Before ten seconds had passed there came a faint whistle, very like that which the boy had given.

"There, did you hear it, Dick?" gasped Roger, turning a flushed face toward his cousin, while his eyes sparkled joyously.

"I heard a sound that might be just such a whistle as Jasper taught us," replied cautious Dick; "but don't build too many castles in the air, Roger, or you may be disappointed. Try again!"

Roger was only too willing to do so, and there was an immediate reply this time, that all of them heard plainly.

“He’s coming this way, I do believe, for that was closer than before. Shall I give him another call?”

“Yes, it can do no harm, and we must know the truth, at any rate.”

When the next answer came back it was beyond all doubt nearer than any that had preceded it.

“Oh! we shall soon see him!” cried Roger, fixing his eyes on the spot, as near as he could calculate, whence that last reply had come. “Now, keep watching, both of you, while I signal to him again that the coast is clear.”

He added one more tremulous trill to his notes; to his astonishment the answer was so plain and clear that it seemed to come straight out of a pine tree not more than twenty-five yards away.

“Why, he must be back of that tree, I think!” stammered Roger, uneasily, for he realized that Jasper Williams could never have gained such a position without some of their eyes detecting his advance.

Just then a bird flew out of the pine and

alighted in another at some distance away in another quarter. Dick himself instantly gave the signal whistle, and there came an immediate answer; but it was now from the quarter whither the bird had flown.

Roger gave a cry of disgust, while Dick laughed softly.

"Good-by to Jasper this time, I'm afraid, Roger!" he said.

"How mean that was for a silly little bird to have the same whistle Jasper had made up as his signal," said Roger, looking downcast. "Come, there's no use in our staying here any longer. If that bird keeps on whistling I might feel like using my gun to bring it down, for I'd think it was mocking me."

"The poor thing thought a mate was calling," Dick assured him; "or else some other male bird that wanted to fight it. I warrant you, it is just as upset as you can be over the mistake."

They pushed on once more, and inside of two hours had come upon at least seven more geysers, some of which were spouting, while others were quiet at the time the three pilgrims happened to find the craters.

Now and then the boys would converse in low tones, for Dick knew that this was the best way

to keep his companion's spirits from drooping.

When other things failed, Dick could always interest him by referring to the wonderful luck that had befallen them, in giving them a chance to stay all winter at the Mandan village with the exploring expedition, so as to go on into the Golden West when spring came around.

The uncertainty that lay ahead seemed to appeal to the spirit of adventure that lay deep down in the hearts of the young pioneers.

"When we break camp in the spring and leave here," Dick went on, as though he had mapped it out in his mind, "we will have to head into the Northwest, Captain Lewis told me."

"Why go that way instead of straight into the West, or turn toward the Southwest?" Roger asked him, just as Dick knew he would be likely to do.

"It seems that the two captains have been picking up all the information they can from every source," Dick explained; "and this, when boiled down, causes them to believe there is a better opening over the great Rocky Mountain chain up there than in any other quarter. Besides, I believe they have an idea there is a great river that flows to the sea, the headwaters of which start in the land of the Blackfeet."

“He must have gotten some of that information from the Blackfoot prisoner the Mandans have in their strong lodge?” suggested Roger, quickly.

“I believe he did,” Dick told him. “I happen to know that both the captains and an interpreter spent many hours with the Blackfoot. And I also heard that they had promised to take the man back to his people with them in the spring; for they were giving the Mandans some presents to coax them to turn him over to them.”

“Oh! just to think, Dick, what it will mean to us, if we are with them when they first set eyes on the big water! Our parents came from the far East, where they knew the Atlantic Ocean; and, if we could only see the other, what a feather it would be in our caps when we got back home.”

Dick had accomplished his purpose, for his cousin showed his old-time enthusiasm again. So they continued to converse as they followed Mayhew, who strode along in advance, constantly on the alert for some new and startling sight, and not at all pleased with his surroundings.

It was after noon had come and gone that he

uttered a cry that the boys understood as a command to halt. Each clutched his gun in the manner of those who know the value of being ready.

“Look away off yonder, up on the low ridge!” said the guide, eagerly.

“Moving figures, and of men at that!” ejaculated Roger.

“Indians, I take it,” said Dick; “for I can see the feathers in their hair, and the sun seems to glisten from their painted bodies. They must be on the warpath, to have put the paint on, and the feathers, too.”

“But look, Dick, there is one of them who wears clothes like a white trapper or border-man!” declared the excited Roger. “Do you see what I mean, Dick?”

“Yes, it certainly looks that way,” answered the other boy, shading his eyes with his hand in order to see better. “It is a white man, too, for he is wearing some kind of fur cap, and his hunting shirt is fringed like our own. There, he turned his face this way then, and he is no Indian, I am as certain as that my name is Dick Armstrong!”

CHAPTER XIX

A SUDDEN PERIL

"Now they have gone!" said Roger, as the figures, outlined against the sky, vanished behind some outcropping rock.

"Yes, and they seemed to be starting down the side of the ridge toward us, as near as I could see," Dick declared, nor did the guide dispute the assertion.

"Could that have been our friend Jasper Williams?" demanded Roger, voicing the vague hope that was pounding at his own heart door.

"He was too far away for us to make sure, one way or another," admitted Dick.

"But he seemed to be of about the same build; and, Dick, you could see nothing to prove that it was any one else, could you?"

"No, only that he was in the company of Indians," and Dick shook his head in a way that spoke of considerable doubt.

"But then," argued Roger, "they might be friendly Mandans, or Sioux, or even some of these Sheep-eaters we've heard about, who live

in certain sections of the Wonderland in brush shacks." (Note 6.)

"Yes, that might be true, for they were too far away for us to tell from the feathers in their scalp-locks what tribe they belonged to," the other boy admitted.

"And the last thing we heard about Jasper, from Hardy and Mordaunt, was that he was being chased by Blackfoot Indians," Roger continued.

"Well," Dick explained, "this white man was no prisoner, for I saw him point ahead at something, which would mean that his arms were not fastened."

"We know that Williams is a remarkable man," mused Roger, "and, even if those braves were of the fierce Blackfoot tribe, he might have managed in some way to have made them his friends. I know it doesn't sound reasonable, but Jasper knows Indian character better than any white man we ever met."

"If he could do that he would be a magician."

"So he would," admitted the other boy, reluctantly; "but what are we going to do about it, Dick?"

"There is nothing for us but to wait and see,"

came the reply. "They acted as though heading in this direction. If you asked me about our best move I'd say, hide and watch. If it turned out to be Jasper we could call out; on the other hand, if it were one of these French trappers, who are hand in glove with the Blackfoot Indians, we needn't let them know we are around."

"But do you think they noticed us?" asked the other boy.

"That is more than I can say. I saw nothing to indicate it; but these redskins are so tricky they would hide it, even if they knew, and were watching us out of the tail of their eyes."

"Let us hide, and see!" Mayhew said just then, showing that he approved of Dick's scheme.

Looking around, they quickly decided where it would be best to conceal themselves. The ground was so rough and uneven that there were plenty of places that had an inviting look. Mayhew selected a patch of bushes as a retreat, and in another minute they were crouching under this shelter.

Although most of the leaves were off the bushes, they grew so densely that it would require something more than a casual glance in

that direction to betray the fact that several figures lurked there.

They heard many different sounds, for silence was hardly ever present in this land of the spouting wells, which roared and hissed and spluttered as they shot up their steaming fountains toward the heavens. There was almost constantly a fretful murmur in the air that might suddenly turn into a whining shriek or a dull roar.

A low exclamation from Mayhew announced that his trained vision had detected some sort of movement, far or near.

"What is it?" demanded Roger, on the right of the guide.

"They are coming!" was the answer.

"Tell us where, that we may see also," the other urged.

"Then turn this way, and look between those two leaning trees," said the guide. "But be careful that you move slowly. It is the quick actions that catch the suspicious eye of an Injun."

"Oh! now I can see them plainly," whispered Roger. "They are heading straight for us!"

"Blackfoot warriors for a certainty!" Dick muttered.

"Can you see the white man plainly, Dick?" asked Roger, impatiently.

"Not just yet," came the reply. "He must be back among some of the Indians who hide him. But we will soon know what to expect. Keep watching."

Almost immediately Roger himself gave a grunt. It sounded as though bitter chagrin was connected with the sound.

"There, I saw him plainly, Dick," he whispered, "and it isn't Jasper Williams at all. The man is a Frenchman, unless my eyes deceive me, and I ought to know what one of them looks like."

"I believe it is none other than our old enemy, François Lascelles!" Dick said in the ear of his cousin; a bit of information that must have given poor Roger a strange thrill, for he could not have imagined any more discouraging news.

"Oh! what if he runs across us here?"

"We would have to fight for our lives, I fear. That man hates all our family about as bitterly as I've heard my father say another Frenchman named Jacques Larue once did."

"But see how many there are of the Indians; a full dozen or more. They look as fierce as any

braves I ever saw. I hope they pass by, and fail to notice us."

"Keep still, Roger, they are getting too close now for us to talk, even in whispers. Be ready for the worst, even while hoping for the best. That is the Armstrong motto, you know. 'Sh!'"

Roger fixed himself so that he could see everything that went on without making the slightest movement. He knew those keen eyes of the red sons of the forest were quick to detect a suspicious movement, no matter how slight, and that, if he so much as lifted his hand, discovery would follow.

The Indians were coming forward in a string, or what the trappers of that day called "Indian file," one stepping in the footprints of the brave ahead of him. In this fashion it would be difficult for any enemy on finding their trail to know whether three or twenty had passed. It was a piece of Indian cunning, and a part of their nature, since it could hardly have been undertaken for any particular reason at this time.

They were heading directly toward the copse, but, since it would offer a bar to their progress, they might turn aside when it was reached.

The boys almost held their breath as they

watched the approach of those fierce-looking Blackfeet. Up to then the brave who was held a prisoner in the Mandan village had been the only member of this noted tribe they had seen at close quarters. (Note 7.)

They were all picked men, if one could judge from their appearance; they were lithe, active as cats, alert, and at the same time muscular. Those swelling bronzed arms could doubtless paddle a dugout or a skin canoe at tremendous speed. Among them there must be braves who had won an enviable reputation for speed at foot races; or, it might be, renown as long distance runners, capable of keeping on the trail at a dog-trot for days and nights at a time.

It was therefore with considerable respect, and not a little anxiety as well, that Dick and Roger watched them coming nearer.

Of course they took note of the white man, too. He was a bold-looking adventurer, such as most of those French traders of the early century were, dashing in appearance, and with a certain air of recklessness about him, such as might be expected in those who daily took their lives in their hands and faced unknown perils in a wilderness that was almost a complete mystery to white men of the day.

François Lascelles had entered largely into the lives of these two boys, even though their opportunities to see the wily and unscrupulous French trader had been few, up to then, and mostly at their home, where he visited to talk business with their parents.

If they had not liked his looks at that time he certainly presented a far less prepossessing appearance now that he was away from all the outposts of civilization and saw no need to repress the tiger element in his nature.

To himself Dick was saying:

“That man would stop at nothing in order to have his own way. If ever we had the bad luck to fall into his power we could not expect any mercy, I am sure. And, if Jasper Williams is now in his hands, nothing can save him, unless we are fortunate enough to be able to come to his rescue.”

This far Dick had arrived in his train of thought when he received a sudden and severe shock. Mayhew had managed to give his foot a slight kick, as though to call his attention to something that was going on out in the open. Dick hardly required this signal to pay attention, for he had already seen what was happening.

The Indians were no longer pushing forward as before. The one in the lead had suddenly stopped up; and he must have given vent to some exclamation that acted like magic on the rest, for every one had halted as though controlled by a single wire.

They seemed to be gathering around their leader, who was pointing excitedly to the ground, as though he had made an important discovery.

Mayhew grunted very softly, but the sound lost none of its significance on account of being so gently emitted. As for Dick, he did not need to be told what it was the Blackfoot had found; for, like a flash, it came to him that he and his companions had headed toward the clump of bushes from that very spot.

The sharp eyes of the leading brave had discovered their trail! It had been a fatal blunder, their neglecting to cover this up in some manner, although, at the time, it might have seemed as though there was not one chance in a thousand the hostiles would come that way.

No one moved, even though they must have felt hot and cold by turns, as the terrible result of the discovery flashed before their minds. The Indians were jabbering together in excited

tones, though what they were saying the boys could only guess, since they knew nothing of the Blackfoot tongue.

The white trader was apparently as curious as any of the dusky braves in his company. He even dropped down on his hands and knees, the better to examine the footprints. Of course it would be patent to them that the tracks were made by white men.

What would be the result? Would they surmise that the three daring invaders of the Evil Manitou's Wonderland, the forge where he made all his thunderbolts, must be secreted near by? Could they read that those tracks had just been made, since blades of brown grass were still springing up after being pressed down?

Perhaps Lascelles even knew that Dick and Roger were searching for Jasper Williams! He seemed to be superhuman when it came to learning things that were supposed to be secret. And, if that were so, then it was indeed a gloomy outlook that faced the pioneer boys.

Dick could only catch his breath and watch to see what would happen next; that, and grip his gun tighter in his hands as he crouched waiting for the explosion. He knew their presence

in the copse was suspected, for the trader was even then pointing straight at the patch of bushes, and saying something to his red companions.

CHAPTER XX

PRISONERS OF THE BLACKFEET

FLIGHT was out of the question, for the boys could hardly hope to excel those fleet-footed Indian braves, however successful Mayhew might have proved.

Indeed, there was little time given to any of them to think of escape. When the wily French trader had conveyed his suspicions to some of the Blackfoot braves there was a concerted dash toward the clump of bushes.

Some of the Indians started to circle around, evidently in the expectation that, if the whites were concealed, they would attempt flight, and the idea of these runners was to forestall any such dash.

"We must hold them back or all is lost!" exclaimed Mayhew, who, being an experienced Indian fighter, doubtless knew the weak and strong points of the red men, no matter to what tribe they belonged.

The report of his long-barreled rifle followed his words almost instantly. There could be no

question but that his bullet found its billet, for Mayhew was a crack shot.

Roger strained his eyes to discover the form of Lascelles among those rushing straight toward the bushes, but he looked in vain. The shrewd Frenchman must have suspected that he would be a shining mark for the concealed riflemen, and hence he had discreetly taken shelter behind a convenient tree trunk, from whence he could observe all that went on, and be ready to appear after the battle was over. Failing to see Lascelles, Roger took hasty aim at the nearest Indian and fired, but apparently missed.

Dick had not thought about trying for the trader; indeed, it might have been the most foolish thing Roger could have done, since the Indians, if successful, would probably dispatch the boys without hesitation, unless there was a restraining hand put out to prevent it.

The tricky warriors came leaping and dodging to the attack, so that it was not the easiest thing in the world to hit such an eccentric target. When Dick fired he felt sure he had not missed, and yet his intended victim failed to fall, though he did act as though wounded.

The guns being now empty the boys drew their pistols. These of course were of the same

construction, being furnished with flint locks. It required considerable knack to be able to discharge such a weapon. The powder had to be shaken afresh into the pan, or there would be no explosion after the flint and steel had come violently in contact. Then, unless the connection were assured through the minute hole, it would result only in a flash in the pan, instead of the weapon doing its full duty.

Roger, always more careless than Dick, snapped his pistol in vain, for there was no report. Perhaps it was just as well, since, in the end, one enemy more or less would have made very little difference.

By this time the Indians were upon them, and each one of the little party found himself in the midst of a whirling force that frustrated all their wild efforts to strike with knife or hatchet.

From a point close at hand a shrill voice was screaming orders in the Indian tongue. Francois had come to life suddenly, after making sure that the whites could no longer cover him with their fire-arms. He was ordering his red minions not to finish the three palefaces, if they expected to obtain the reward he had promised them.

All this the boys heard as in a dream. They

were so furiously engaged at the time, it was little attention they paid to anything that was going on. To avoid the savage blows aimed at them by dusky hands that gripped stone tomahawks, was about as much as they could manage. It was only later on, when they had a chance to exchange views concerning the fight, that they reached such a conclusion.

Such an unequal contest could not last long. Dick and Roger were pulled to the ground by the many hands that gripped them. Struggling to the bitter end, they expected that some one of their red antagonists would finish them with a fell sweep of those flourished tomahawks; indeed, Dick shut his eyes in anticipation of such a tragedy, and before his inward vision there flashed one glimpse of the dear ones in the far distant home on the bank of the Missouri.

But the blow did not fall. He could hear the excited voice of Lascelles haranguing the braves, and, opening his eyes again, Dick found that the French trader had interposed his arm between the threatening weapons and the two boys.

Just what François was saying to his allies Dick could not tell, since he knew little of Indian talk, and nothing at all of the Blackfoot language. He could, of course, guess that Las-

celles, for some reason of his own, did not wish the boys slain. It could hardly have been pity that influenced the trader, for he was a cruel man.

Dick became aware of several other things just then. One was that Roger was keeping up his vain struggling, despite the fact that a couple of brawny braves were sitting on him.

“Keep still, Roger,” commanded Dick, realizing that the impulsive lad was imperiling both of their lives by his senseless actions; “you can never break away, and by keeping up that fighting you may force them to knock us on the head. We are prisoners, and there is no help for it.”

Roger stopped his writhing and beating with his fists, though the fact that he had to yield to the inevitable forced a groan from his lips.

“Where is Mayhew?” asked Dick, noting that the scout did not seem to be near.

Before Roger could frame any sort of a reply they heard a series of yells from a little distance, followed by a shot.

“He must have managed to break away, Dick,” exclaimed Roger, when he could get rid of the dirt that impeded his speaking; “and

some of the Indians have followed after him. Oh, I hope he has not been killed!"

"That didn't sound like it," Dick told him. "There was a deal of baffled fury in those Indian yells. Mayhew may get clear away, after all. He has no equal as a runner among all the men of the expedition."

There was no time to say more, nor were the conditions by which the two boys were surrounded of a nature to invite conversation.

Lascelles had apparently convinced those of the Indians who seemed most bent on finishing the white boys that it would be more to their advantage to hold them as prisoners or hostages, for reluctantly they dropped their up-lifted weapons. That more than one of them did this under protest could be seen from the manner in which they eyed the prisoners, and shook their feather bedecked heads.

"Get up, you American swine!" said Lascelles, accompanying his remark with a kick from the toe of his moccasin.

As there was no longer a weight on his chest Roger sprang to his feet as though he had been shot up by a gigantic spring. His face was white with anger, and he would have leaped straight at the throat of the insulting French

trader, despite the fact of Lascelles holding a leveled pistol in front of him, only that Dick seized hold and held him back.

“You are crazy to think of that, Roger! Have some sense. Think of those at home, and do nothing to force his hand!”

It was a terrible task for the hot-blooded boy to subside. He gave Lascelles a look that spoke volumes, but which only caused the Frenchman to grin in pleasure, for he had no idea that these boys would ever be given the chance to turn the tables on him.

Neither of the boys had been badly hurt in the fierce scrimmage, though scratches and minor cuts were in evidence, and they looked the worse for wear. Deprived of every weapon, they were helpless in the midst of that circle of hostile Blackfeet, and could only grit their teeth and give back look for look in a resolute fashion.

Lascelles stood before them, with folded arms, and a sneer on his dark face. From a point still more remote there came again those yells of baffled rage to tell that the skillful Mayhew must still be eluding his pursuers.

“So, zis is ze young Armstrongs zat I haf ze pleasure to entertain?” the trader started to

say, as though he had a communication to make which he fancied would add still more to their wretchedness, and it was necessary to first of all "break the ice."

"Yes, we are the Armstrong boys, and you are Francois Lascelles," replied Dick. "What business have you trying to make us prisoners? We are not interfering with these Indians in their hunting grounds. The last time we saw you it was at the cabin of our grandfather, David Armstrong. Why do you not order these warriors to set us free? We will go back to the camp from which we came, and they will not see us again."

"Eet is not to be as you wish, but as I say," the Frenchman observed, with a pompous inflation of his chest, as became a victor. "I haf you in my power, and zat ees vat I am here for. Eef you evair return to ze home again eet vill not be until ze winter is gone. Zen eet vill be too late to take ze leetle paper to zose zat sit by ze fire-side, and wait day by day for you to come back!"

At hearing this Dick felt considerable relief. Perhaps, after all, the Frenchman was not quite so bad a man as he had believed. He spoke as though there might be a possibility of their being kept prisoners through the winter, and set

free in the spring, when it was no longer possible for them to reach home before the time limit had expired, and their parents ousted from their property.

That would mean that long months must elapse. They might even be taken to the Blackfoot village, leagues and leagues away, but there would always remain a chance for escape. Dick was a firm believer in the old motto that "while there's life there's hope."

"You know why we are here in this strange land, then?" he remarked, chiefly to draw the other out, so that something might be learned concerning the whereabouts of Jasper Williams.

"Yes, eet is all plain to me vy you come here," Lascelles assured him, nodding as he spoke. "I haf made sure zat ze paper you could nevaire secure. I haf already ze Williams a prisoner in anuzzer camp, vere my son Alexis and ze brave French comrades zay watch heem like ze weasel."

"You mean that Jasper Williams is a prisoner, do you?" asked Dick, while Roger listened eagerly, trying to read the grinning countenance of Lascelles, and determine whether he was speaking the truth, or concocting a lie for some evil purpose.

"Zat ees vat I am saying," continued Lascelles; "I haf arranged zat he may be taken to ze village of Black Otter, and adopted into ze tribe. Ze big chief haf long wished to haf ze white man show zem many things zat zey do not know. Williams nevaire come back from ze Blackfoot country. Eet is many days' journey into ze cold Northwest, and no white man has ever seen the wigwams of Black Otter."

"But what will you do with us; I hope you will not send us with the Blackfeet also?" asked Dick, still seeking information.

"I haf not yet made up my mind, but pouf! vat does it matter to me? So zat you may not send ze word down to ze town on zat Missouri I care not vat becomes of ze Armstrong vermin. I haf Williams, and now both ends zey are tied up. Zat ees well!"

"You will have to prove it before I believe Williams is your prisoner!" said Dick.

"Ah! zat ees easy," retorted the Frenchman; "you haf seen zis knife in hees possession, it may be. Do you not recognize eet? Williams think so much of zat knife he would not let it leave hees person. But I haf eet here. So you see zere ees ze proof zat he ees a prisoner in zat uzzer camp."

CHAPTER XXI

BINDING UP AN ENEMY'S WOUNDS

“Do you believe him, Dick?” asked Roger, huskily, after the French trader had turned his back on them, and the Indians busied themselves binding the hands of their captives behind their backs, using deerskin thongs for the purpose.

“I’m afraid it must be so,” replied Dick. “I happen to know about that knife, and have heard Williams say he prized it above anything he possessed. It has saved his life more than once, I understand.”

“Then if you recognized the knife it would mean that he is a prisoner like ourselves,” admitted Roger, with a long-drawn sigh.

“We may be taken to where he is being kept,” the other told him.

“They say misery likes company.”

“Oh! you must never give in like that. I tell you it is bound to come out right in the end, though things may look dark just now. Such a bad man could not win out ultimately. Do as I am doing and refuse to allow yourself to think such a thing can happen.”

"I try to—honestly I do, Dick; but what hope have we now? Here we are in the power of that rascal, who means to see to it that we do not get free until spring, and even then he may leave us to our fate. And, as if that were not enough, Jasper Williams, the only one who can save our parents' homes, is a prisoner and will be sent into the wilderness, never to be seen again."

Dick could understand what a weight rested on the mind of his cousin. Was he not himself fighting against the same depression, and conquering it only because he would not give in?

"Listen, Roger," he said, impressively, "there is only one way for us to win this fight, and that is by making up our minds nothing can ever best us. Brace up, and shut your teeth together in the old way."

"Forgive me for giving in so soon; you are curing me fast now. I already feel that things are never so dark but that they might be worse."

"Much worse," Dick told him, resolutely. "Whenever you feel your knees beginning to get weak under you, just shut your eyes and see father, mother and little Mary sitting by the fireside at home. It will do wonders. I know, for I have often tried it myself."

By this time the Indians had finished binding

their arms behind them. Evidently they expected to go to some other place to camp.

The day was not far from its close. Dick wondered whether they were to be taken to the place where Jasper Williams was being held prisoner. Lascelles had said it was a camp where his son Alexis and some other Frenchmen were in charge, showing that he must wield considerable influence over the warlike Blackfeet.

There was nothing to indicate what the result of the pursuit of Mayhew had been, up to the time they started forth. This in itself gave the boys a faint hope the guide might have eluded his pursuers. They had considerable faith in Mayhew, and believed that he would not desert them.

Still, what could one man do against such a legion of enemies, and especially when in almost as much fear of the wonders of that enchanted region as the superstitious Indians themselves?

Some of the Indians walked ahead, while others brought up the rear, once they started. Dick was curious enough to take note of the course they pursued. He had a dogged faith to believe that sooner or later he would want

to know something about this ground, for he hoped to tread it again on the return journey to the explorers' camp.

It was, he found, a difficult task to keep track of their passage. This was chiefly caused by the meanderings of the Indians. Whenever they fancied they were approaching one of the spouting wells, with its steam column, and its roaring voice, they would sheer off to one side, and circle around it.

All this made their course an eccentric one, and Dick found it beyond his power to figure it out. All he could do was to note the general direction in which they were heading, and store it away in his memory for future use.

Roger was close enough to him to allow of an occasional interchange of remarks. Their captors seemed to pay no attention to what they were saying; and of course none of them understood a word of it, so the boys saw no need of restricting themselves when discussing their hopes and fears.

"I believe they intend to camp before long," Dick said presently, as they continued to move along through the pine-clad side of the slope that rose to form a foothill to the mountain chain further away.

"But the sun is only setting, and these Indians never get tired, so what makes you think they will halt?" Roger asked, himself very weary.

"But Lascelles is not anxious to keep going when there is no need," explained the other prisoner. "I saw him point out a spot to the tall Indian at his side, who must be a sub-chief from the feathers in his scalp-lock, and the bears' claws he carries about his neck. The Indian shook his head, and pointed ahead, as if he meant that he knew of a much better place to spend the night."

"I hope there's a bubbling spring there, and that it's ice-cold," ventured Roger, "for I'm dry as a bone, and somehow most of the water up here is luke-warm, when it isn't nearly boiling."

"There was that one place we struck," Dick remarked, "where a cold stream ran so close to one of the hot pools that I really believe you could catch a trout in the one, give it a swing over your head, and drop it in the other so it would be cooked without being taken off the hook."

"I can see what the folks at home will do and say when you tell that yarn," observed

Roger, with a faint chuckle, as though for the moment he had forgotten their predicament.

“Look, there are three other Indians waiting for us by that dead tree!” Dick suddenly exclaimed.

“One of them is wounded in the shoulder, too!” remarked Roger. “Oh! Dick, can those be the men who pursued Mayhew?”

“I was just thinking about that myself,” returned the other; “and, now that you ask me, I must say I believe they are. That one certainly has been struck by a bullet. See how crudely they have bandaged the wound. If they would let me try my hand I could do a heap better.”

“Suppose you tell that to Lascelles,” suggested Roger, quickly. “It might make us friends among the Indians, and goodness knows we need them. Besides, I never liked to see even an Indian suffer.”

“I remember hearing my father tell how, long years ago, when they were living up on the bank of the Ohio, they found a young Indian badly wounded, and took him into their camp to nurse. Some of the settlers, who believed that every Indian was a snake in the grass, wanted to put him to death, but father

and uncle had their way, and Blue Jacket's life was spared."

"Yes," added Roger, "and ever afterwards he was the best friend the settlers had. Why, he even followed our parents most of the way down to the Mississippi, when they descended the Ohio River on a flatboat. And then another time, you remember, they won the good will of the great Indian chief, Pontiac, by saving his life."

"That is a fact, Roger; and he gave them a wampum belt that kept them from the fury of the Indian ever afterwards. Some people may not think it pays to befriend an Indian, but we have been taught differently."

When the three Indians joined the main column Dick tried to ascertain whether they had been successful in their pursuit of Mayhew, or had met with failure.

He knew it would be folly to try to obtain this information through the wily Frenchman, who, wishing to add to their distress, would very likely boast that the frontiersman had been brought down.

Dick, however, quickly made up his mind that this could not be the case. The sullen manner of the three braves was enough in itself to tell

the story of their having been outwitted by Mayhew. Then, besides, if they had slain the hunter they would be shouting of victory and holding up a freshly taken scalp in evidence.

"Depend on it, our friend got away," Dick told Roger.

"I was thinking that myself," returned the other, "for they look mad enough to bite a nail in two, if they knew what such a thing was."

For some little time they marched along steadily. Then the important-looking Indian, who was walking alongside Lascelles, turned, and called out something in his own language.

"Good! we are going to stop at last!" muttered Roger. "I can hear the tinkling of a running brook close by. I hope the water is good and cold, and that they let me drink my fill."

There was no doubt about it, for the Indians no longer kept pushing forward. To make a camp, when far from home, was an easy matter for these hardy braves, accustomed, as they were, to enduring all manner of hardships with the stoicism that has always distinguished their race.

There were no tents to erect, no packs to undo, and getting the meal was a most primitive operation, since it would probably consist of cook-

ing some sort of meat by thrusting it in the flames at the end of long sticks of wood.

When some of the braves started to fasten the prisoners to two trees that grew close together, Dick thought it about time to begin making friends. Accordingly he called to Lascelles to approach, as he had a communication to make that might strike him favorably.

"I have had some success in binding up gunshot wounds," Dick told him, "and if I was given a chance I believe I could do that poor fellow some good. He may bleed to death unless something is done."

The wily Frenchman eyed him keenly.

"Zat sounds very good, but how am I to know zat you vill not try to escape if ze bonds zey are remove?" he demanded suspiciously.

"I will give you my promise not to attempt anything of the sort as long as my hands are free," Dick assured him. "Besides, it would be folly to try to run away when you have your gun, and they their bows and arrows handy. Come, loosen my hands and let me see what I can do."

Lascelles made sure to get the consent of the chief before he would touch the thongs, but he finally did so. Some of the Indians, learn-

ing that the paleface boy was a medicine man among his people, watched with some interest to see how he treated the wound of their companion.

Dick had in truth been unusually successful in handling this particular form of injury, and knew about how it should be treated. He had scant material with which to work, but his deft fingers made up in part for the want of other things.

The salve which he produced from his ditty bag was home-made, for his mother knew all about medicinal herbs and their values.

When, after completing the job, Dick looked up into the face of his "patient" and asked how it felt, while the brave may not have understood the exact words, at the same time he must have guessed the nature of the inquiry, for he nodded his head in the affirmative as though to admit that his condition had been made much more bearable.

"Now you *have* got a job on your hands!" sang out Roger, as he saw the other wounded warriors pressing forward, as though meaning to have their hurts looked after in the same fashion.

Dick was satisfied that this was not an effort

thrown away. If he could make the Blackfeet understand that white men were not the unfeeling monsters they had been painted by the French fur-traders it would be a good thing. Besides, they knew not what their future might be, and the time was likely to come when a friend in the Indian camp would prove a profitable investment. (Note 8.)

"We ought to call this camp Armstrong Hospital, I think!" said Roger, after it was all finished, and Dick had been secured to his tree near by.

"I hope my work wasn't wholly wasted," remarked Dick. "As they have built a fire it seems settled that we are to stay here to-night. Perhaps to-morrow they mean to take us to the other camp, where Lascelles said Williams is held a prisoner."

"And on my part," added the other captive, "I hope they will give us some of the meat they've started to cook. When I can catch his eye I want to ask Lascelles to get me a drink of water. My tongue seems to be sticking to the roof of my mouth."

"If we could make one of the wounded Indians understand, I think they would do a little thing like that for us; but the Frenchman seems

to be scowling blackly at me just now. Perhaps, after all, he is sorry about letting me dress the wounds of the braves; he may suspect that I'm getting too popular, and that it may somehow hurt his game in the end."

"Who knows how that may work out?" declared Roger. "One thing is sure, we must keep our wits about us, and try to figure out a way to get free."

Dick seemed to be of the same mind, for he nodded his head, and said:

"If we have half a chance we must try to escape to-night. That Canadian scout in the explorers' camp, Drewyer, knows considerable about these Blackfoot Indians, and he told me they are very treacherous, often killing their captives as they take a freak, or the medicine man of the tribe has a pretended message from Manitou that they must be put to death. So we dare not trust them, but must escape by any means."

CHAPTER XXII

IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT

APPARENTLY it was not the design of Lascelles to starve his prisoners, for later on he had them untied, and gave them a chance to devour some of the crudely cooked buffalo meat. They were also permitted to drink their fill of the cold water in the brook.

After all this had been done, with the trader watching them constantly, and holding his gun in readiness to frustrate any attempt at escape, the boys were once more tied with long thongs to the trees.

They noticed, however, that the brave who fastened them was inclined to be much more gentle with them than on the first occasion. Dick believed the seed of kindness he had sown was commencing to take root.

“It will be a night that we shall never forget, Dick,” Roger remarked. “If it blows up windy and cold, as it was when we were in the cave, we will suffer terribly here.”

“Let us hope then that we may not be here all night long,” Dick ventured; and somehow his manner, as well as his words, caused the blood of his companion to leap in his veins.

“Do you really mean it?” Roger asked. “Is there a chance that we can break loose, tied up as we are? Are you depending on Mayhew to come to our rescue? Surely, you could not have had any signal from him?”

“Nothing,” replied the other. “But have you noticed where they put our guns and powder horns?”

“I must say I hadn’t thought much about that part of it,” confessed Roger; “but, since you mention it, I think they are over against that tree. The Indians are afraid of firearms, you know. Perhaps the chief Lascelles spoke to us about, and whom he called Black Otter, hopes to force Williams into teaching him how to use ‘the sticks that spit out fire and stinging things.’ ”

“There is another thing that, perhaps, I ought to tell you,” continued Dick, in a low tone. He saw the Frenchman looking over at them just then, as though wondering what they were finding to talk about, and debating whether it might not be safer to separate the pair.

"If it's anything that will make me feel more cheerful, I hope you will lose no time in doing so," Roger hastened to say.

"Please keep from showing so much in your face then," Dick told him; "or that man may be able to read the whole story from where he sits. Act as though we were without the first ray of hope. He is a suspicious sort of man. We must try to make him believe we mean to make the best of it."

"Now tell me, Dick; I am looking as if I'd lost my last friend. What has happened? I am sure you have made some discovery."

"Oh! not so very great," replied Dick; "only that I believe I can get my hands free with very little effort."

"How does that happen?" wondered Roger; "mine are as tight as they can well be. Did that Indian favor you when he fastened us up the last time; or was it through an accident?"

"Neither one nor the other, it happens," said the second prisoner, coolly. "I remembered to swell up my wrists in a way I can do, when he was putting the thongs around them. By reducing them to the utmost, my hands are almost free, and it will take but little effort for me to free them entirely."

"And then you can set me loose, too, though I am afraid it will take you a long time to get those knots undone. It must be an Indian way of tying thongs, for I never saw its like before."

"There is a better way than that," Dick assured him. "Don't turn your head just now to look, because Lascelles is watching us like a hawk; but some time later on, when his back is this way, cast your eyes to the right, and, sticking in the tree not more than five feet away, you will see my hunting knife!"

"Oh! how came it there?" demanded Roger, watching the French trader, and ready to take advantage of the fact if Lascelles should happen to look away, even for a moment.

"I saw a brave give it a jab into the tree when he was cutting some thongs from a strip of buckskin before we were tied up; and ever since I have watched to see if any one removed it. So far, it has remained there."

The Indians had by this time settled down to take things as comfortably as conditions allowed. The fire was sending out considerable heat, and around the cheery blaze the red men squatted, each with his gaudy-colored blanket about his shoulders. Some of them were scant-

ily clad for the wintry season, though doubtless it did not occur to them in that light, as they had become habituated to exposure.

The two boys looked at the picture presented. They would, if they were fortunate enough to live through the experience, often recall it in future days, and, it was to be hoped, under happier skies.

High the sparks soared from the fire, with the red tongues of flame jumping up as though in riotous sport. The bending tops of the neighboring pines seemed to be whispering together as though communicating the secrets of the wilderness. It was all so strange and wonderful, even after the remarkable sights they had looked on of late, that Roger asked himself whether it could be real, or only a dream.

Several of the Blackfeet had produced red clay pipes and were smoking some weed that, for all the boys could tell, may have been tobacco, cured after their own tribal fashion.

"I only wish I could put something in that stuff to make them sleep like logs until dawn," said Roger.

"They are beginning to show signs of getting drowsy," Dick assured him. "Already several have curled up in their blankets, and seem to

be fast asleep. Here comes the Frenchman to take a last look at us before he follows them into dreamland."

"Oh! be careful that he may not learn of the trick you played with your bonds!" Roger whispered, in sudden alarm lest the crafty trader make a discovery that would destroy the hope they were hugging to their hearts.

"Leave that to me, for I feel sure I can deceive him, even if he tries my bonds to see how secure they are," Dick assured him.

Apparently Lascelles was very sleepy, for he yawned several times as he felt of the thongs, to see how they had been tied by the brave to whom the task had been delegated.

"Eet is too bad zat you haf to stand all ze night," he told the boys; "but eet cannot be helped. Eet is ze fortune of war. Ven boys try to play ze part of men zey must take ze good wif ze bad. In ze morning, unless ze storm delay us, we vill hope to reach ze uzzer camp, and then you see heem."

He walked away after delivering himself of these few remarks. The boys knew very well who was meant by "heem," for it could only refer to Jasper Williams.

"That sounds as if he has Jasper, sûre

enough," remarked Roger, when they once more were by themselves.

"Yes, and if we get away from here it must be our duty to free him. We did it once before, you remember; and what was next door to a miracle then can happen again."¹

When another half-hour had crept around, conditions in the Indian camp had undergone a decided change. There had been no sentry set that the boys observed, and Dick had counted the Indians many times to make sure that all were around the fire. They lay sprawled in such postures as their fancy dictated. Some had their backs against the trunks of trees, while others extended themselves at full length on the ground.

One and all seemed to be sound asleep. Acting upon the advice of Dick, both of the boys had assumed an attitude calculated to deceive any one who might be sending an occasional glance in their direction, and make it appear as though they, too, had yielded to the demands of the slumber god.

"Is it time yet, Dick?" whispered Roger for the third time, when it seemed as if his blood had almost stopped circulating on account of

¹ See "The Pioneer Boys of the Missouri."

the tight bonds, and he doubted his ability to use his legs, even if set free.

“Wait a little longer,” he was told, in the same cautious tone, which, if heard at all, would be considered but the murmur of the cool night breeze in the nodding pine-tops.

The half-hour lengthened to a full one; and even this was now growing, until it must soon measure a second hour. Roger could not stand it much longer. He felt as though something within him would burst unless he could make a move of some sort.

“Listen,” whispered Dick, just then, as if in answer to the silent plea, “I saw something move across on the other side of the camp. A hand seemed to gently wave to me, and it was not the hand of an Indian, either. I firmly believe Mayhew, Heaven bless him, has come back, taking his life in his hand, meaning to rescue us from the Indians.”

CHAPTER XXIII

THE ESCAPE

“THAT is good news, Dick!” whispered Roger.

“There, did you see him that time?” the other asked, as cautiously as though he believed every sleeping Indian possessed such keen hearing that a very small sound would awaken him.

“Yes, and I believe it must be Mayhew. Are you starting to work your hands free, Dick? Oh! lose no time, I beg!”

“It is nearly done,” came in a breath from the other; for all this time Dick had been working his hands as cleverly as he could, considering the fact that they had been tied behind him as he stood against the tree.

A slight movement on his part a minute later told the anxious Roger that he had finally succeeded in accomplishing his task. His hands were free, and wrestling with the knots in the thongs that bound his body to the tree.

When Roger presently saw his companion move, and then slowly sink down to the ground, he held his breath, for he knew that, so far as

bonds were concerned, Dick was no longer a prisoner.

His next move would be to reach after that convenient knife, thrust into the tree close by. Roger turned his eyes in the other direction. His greatest fear now was that one of the sleeping braves might wake up, and spoil all their plans.

When he saw no sign of such a thing his heart beat a little less tumultuously, and he breathed freely once more. But it was a period of suspense Roger would never forget.

Even the slight sound made by a passing breeze struck a note of deadly fear in the heart of the waiting lad; it seemed to be a crash of thunder that would surely arouse the whole camp. Yet no one so much as stirred.

Dick had obtained the knife, it seemed. Roger could feel him at work. How it thrilled him to know that those painful bonds were about to fall away, leaving him free to stretch his arms, and his lower limbs, so dreadfully cramped during the hours that had passed since they tied him there.

Dick, crouching behind the tree, had to work in the dark, and mostly through instinct, his sense of touch taking the place of sight.

He was succeeding, at any rate, which must be reckoned the main thing. Roger knew when the stout deerskin rope that kept him rigid against the tree had been severed, for a hand instantly steadied him, lest he fall over.

There now remained only the bonds about his wrists, and they were apt to prove the most troublesome of all. What if the steel blade did give him several scratches and slight cuts? He could stand almost anything while hope of liberty swelled within him.

There, it was done at last! His hands fell limply at his sides, numb and almost useless, for they had been tied much tighter than in Dick's case.

The friendly hand plucked at his sleeve. Dick meant this as a sign that they must be getting away without loss of time, since every second spent there meant additional risk of discovery.

It appeared a simple matter for Roger to copy the example of his comrade and drop to the ground, in order to crawl away; and yet, when he came to do it, he found that his knees were almost rigid, and could only be bent after a violent effort.

Dick must have planned everything beforehand. In times past he had shown himself to

be a master hand at laying out plans to be pursued in emergencies, and while tied to the tree, observing all that went on in the Indian camp, he surely had had plenty of opportunities to note the conditions surrounding him.

At least he did not seem to be confused but went about the task of leading his companion to safety as though it were all a part of a schedule.

Dick had not quite understood the mute signals which Mayhew had made when moving his hand above the bushes; but it seemed as if he meant to let them know he was about to make his way to a point in their rear, where he might find a better opportunity to assist them.

Dick hoped they would have the good fortune to run across the guide. Three would be much better than two, surrounded as they were by so many perils.

When Roger became aware of the fact that his pilot had stopped abruptly, he felt a cold chill run over him, thinking it could only mean that the discovery they feared was upon them.

Then he realized that Dick was softly laying hands on some objects that had rested against a tree-trunk. Like a flash it dawned on Roger that they must be their guns, for he recollected

it was exactly in this quarter they had noted the weapons.

What a wonderful fellow Dick was, apparently capable of remembering everything, no matter how minute the detail might be! Roger breathed easy again. He even managed to put out his hand and receive one of the guns from his comrade, accompanied by a low hiss of warning.

Roger knew what was meant by this, and he was very careful that his gun should not come in violent contact with the tree-trunk or the ground.

At that moment he chanced to look around, and what was his horror on discovering that one of the Indians had raised his head! He seemed to be looking straight at the two boys, and, as the flickering fire still gave a small amount of light, he must surely have seen them.

Roger wanted to let Dick know, but his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth, and he could not make a sound. Dick was now moving off again, creeping along more like a great cat than a human being, so there was nothing left for Roger to do but follow in his wake.

Every moment he expected to hear a yell of alarm from the Indian who had been watching

their movements. As each second passed, Roger was certain that the cry was bound to break forth with the coming of the next.

His feet dragged like lead, because he believed the attempt to escape was bound to be useless, and that they could not possibly get away. He counted the passage of time by the throbs of his heart.

Once a twig flew up and struck Roger on the knee. It was a blow as light as the falling of a leaf, yet to the boy it seemed as though a heavy hand had been suddenly laid upon him.

But, strangely enough, nothing happened! No yell rang out; nor was there an uprising of those dusky forms that lay about the smoldering fire. Foot by foot the ground was passed over, and in a brief time they might hope to gain the shelter of the friendly bushes back of which Mayhew, it was hoped, would be found.

Still Roger dared not believe the escape would be effected without an explosion of some sort. He knew that the pioneers classed all Indians with the cat tribe in regard to craftiness and cruelty. How many times had he, as a small lad, watched their pet cat catch a mouse, and then play with the doomed animal, letting it go just for the pleasure of pouncing on it afresh.

The conviction that pressed so heavily on his heart now was that this brave was simply waiting until the escaping prisoners had gained a certain point, when he would give the cry that would send the red inmates of the camp after them in hot haste.

But now they were at the fringe of bushes, and Dick had even commenced creeping around one end of the break, afraid to enter lest they cause a rustling that would imperil their safety.

Roger summoned all his nerve and looked back. To his amazement he saw that the watchful brave still had his head partly raised, and was, to all appearances, looking after them.

It was a mystery in the boy's mind that ranked with those strange things they had continued to discover ever since invading this Land of Wonders. That the warrior saw them making their escape, and still refrained from giving the alarm, was a fact beyond his comprehension.

Dick was moving faster now, though still taking pains not to make any sound that could be possibly avoided. Then Roger caught the low, tremulous note of a bird, hardly more than a chirp. Was that Mayhew trying to let them know he was close by? Roger hoped so with all his heart.

He could barely see Dick's bulk just ahead of him, and it was on it that he fastened his gaze. If the pilot suddenly came to a pause, Roger meant to be in a condition to instantly follow suit.

Whispering caught his ear. Surely Dick was not talking to himself, but must have come in contact with the creeping guide. All seemed going well, and, so far, there had been no alarm from the camp.

A minute later he knew that Dick was no longer on his hands and knees, but had gained his feet. This meant that the time had come when they might take more chances, and increase the swiftness of their flight.

Roger noted, too, that there was another figure ahead of his cousin, which he knew could be no other than the guide, gallant Mayhew, who had scorned to seek safety for himself while his young friends were in peril.

Far away could be heard the dismal howling of a wolf pack. An owl sent out a mournful hoot from the depths of the pine woods on the side of the mountain. But back there, where the dying camp fire flickered, and the red men slumbered, not a sound arose. Roger marveled more than ever. He knew that his eyes had

not deceived him, and that the Indian had actually watched them making their escape. But what magic had rendered his tongue mute the boy could not guess.

When half a mile had been placed between them and the hostile camp Dick broke the silence.

“Do you think we are safe away, Mayhew?” he asked, cautiously.

“It looks that way,” replied the figure plodding ahead of the boys; “and I must say it beats all how you managed to get free from those deerskin thongs. There are other things that puzzle me, too; but all that can keep until later.

“Oh! I am glad to hear you say you believe we are well out of that fix!” exclaimed Roger, who had looked back nervously over his shoulder many times, and even shuddered at hearing the slightest rustling sound, dreading lest the tricky Indians might be creeping after them, and suddenly awaken the echoes of the pine forest with their war-whoops.

“It was one of the closest calls we ever had,” admitted Dick.

“And we have known a good many of them,” added Roger, with a slight return of his old feeling of elation, for the reaction was begin-

ning to set in, so that from the depths of despair he would soon find himself elevated to the heights of exultation.

“One thing that none of us has thought to notice so far,” commented Dick, “is that it has at last commenced to snow as though it meant business.” When he brought this fact to their attention the others perceived that it was indeed so, for already the ground had begun to turn white.

CHAPTER XXIV

AN INDIAN'S GRATITUDE

FOR some time the three fugitives plodded through the pine forest that lay along the side of the mountain ridge, enclosing the wide valley in which the camp of the Indians had been pitched.

The snow was coming down in earnest now. It acted as though bent on making up for lost time; and, unless all signs failed, there would be an exceedingly heavy fall before they saw the sun again.

One comfort they found in this coming of the white mantle—they could not be tracked by Lascelles and his allies when their escape was discovered.

“Dick!” ventured Roger, after quite a long time had elapsed, and they found the snow getting constantly deeper underfoot.

“Well?”

“We have our guns, it is true, and that I count a fine thing, but of what use are they to us without our powder horns?”

"That was our misfortune, Roger, but we can borrow from Mayhew here. By being prudent we ought to make his supply go around."

Imagine the feelings of the two boys when the guide gave utterance to an exclamation of disgust and chagrin.

"I hate to tell you, lads," he said, "but it must have happened during my flight. I had fired twice, and given the red hounds cause to be sorry they chased after me; and then I suddenly missed my powder horn. It must have been torn loose while I was passing through some dense bushes."

"Did you go back and try to find it?" asked Dick, while Roger seemed mute with consternation.

"Yes, but it was no use," replied the guide, "and I had to give it up."

"Then we are in a bad way, without any ammunition for our guns," Dick continued, though he did not attempt to criticize Mayhew, for he realized that, after all, it had been an accident, liable to happen to any one, and he felt sure the frontiersman must be suffering in his mind on account of it.

"I have the load in my gun, and one in my pistol," said Mayhew. "Besides that I found a

little powder wrapped in a paper in one of my pockets, enough to charge one of your guns, and some left over for priming."

"That was lucky, at any rate; how came you to have it with you?" asked Dick.

"I remember that, some time before I left on that trip back to the Missouri and down to the outposts of civilization, I was cleaning out my powder horn, and the little it contained I placed in that paper, and then in my pocket. I forgot all about it when I filled the horn from the stores. Now, it may be, that one charge will stand between us and starvation."

"Oh! I hope it will never get as bad as that, Mayhew," said Dick; and yet, deep down in his heart, he knew they were facing a desperate condition, so far away from the rest of the expedition, and surrounded by perils of every type.

"Two charges in all!" summed up Roger, finding his voice. "That means that we must make each one tell. And, Dick, I want you to load your gun with that spare powder Mayhew has. You are a surer shot than I, and when we use that load it must bring returns."

"We'll see about that later on," was all Dick replied.

"But now that we can talk without running any danger," continued Roger, anxious to learn whether either of the others had noticed the same strange happening in the camp of Black-feet, "I want to ask you why that Indian, who was watching us go away, failed to give the alarm?"

Dick stopped short. He seemed to be astonished beyond measure at what the other had just said.

"Do you mean to tell me, Roger, that you believe any such thing?" he asked.

"I certainly do," came the response. "I looked back more times than I can tell you, and there he was, craning his neck and watching everything we did. To the very last I saw him still looking."

"Yes, he is right!" declared Mayhew, breaking in upon the dialogue as though he, too, had been grappling with a mystery that he could not understand. "I saw the same thing. The Indian was watching you, I could swear to that. Once he dropped his head, only to raise it again. He seemed to be having some difficulty about holding himself up long, for he was bandaged about the shoulder."

"Oh!"

The way Dick said that one word told Roger that he must have seen a great light. But why should Dick show signs of satisfaction; for that was clearly expressed in his tone?

“You have guessed the answer, Dick?” exclaimed Roger, hastily. “Please tell us what it is, because, for one, I am groping in the dark.”

“You heard what Mayhew just said, and how the man who looked was wounded in the shoulder? Stop and think, and you will remember that he must be the one who had chased after Mayhew, and came back with a bullet wound in the muscles of his shoulder.”

“Which you dressed as neatly as any doctor could have done it,” said Roger.

“At the time the brave gave little sign that he was grateful,” continued Dick, as he figured things out; “but you know that all Indians practice hiding their real feelings. They think it weak to show signs of fear or anything like that. But, at the same time, an Indian can be grateful, and I believe that brave proved it.”

“He did, oh! he did!” exclaimed Roger, no longer groping in darkness since Dick had thrown light on the mystery. “He knew we were escaping, but he could not find it in his heart to betray the one who had been so kind

to him! I shall never believe so badly of Indians after this. My father was right when he told me they could be reached by kindness; and surely he and Uncle Bob ought to know."

Somehow all of them fell silent for some time. No doubt they were thinking how strangely they had been favored by Providence. (Note 9.)

Several hours had elapsed since the escape, and they were some distance away from the scene of the adventure. The snow was more than ankle deep, and coming down at a furious rate.

Walking was difficult, especially since all of them were weary, and in great need of rest. Roger staggered at times, and once fell flat, though he hastened to assure the others, as he scrambled to his feet, that he had not suffered by his awkwardness.

"We will have to seek shelter of some sort," declared Dick, finally.

Apparently the frontiersman was only waiting to hear something like this; for, as a grown man, he did not fancy being the first to call quits, as long as those boys saw fit to keep on tramping.

"It would not be a bad idea, I think," he now remarked.

"If we could have a fire like we did that other night it would feel good to me," Roger told them.

"We might try," said Dick.

"And when morning comes, how about breakfast?" continued Roger. "What meat I had was taken away from me, and you must be in the same fix."

"Yes, they thought it was useless to let me keep on carrying fresh elk meat when we all needed something to eat. But I am thankful they left me my ditty bag; and I have my knife too, you remember. How about you, Mayhew?"

"I still have some meat with me; about enough for one meal around," replied the guide. "After that is gone we will have to shoot game of some sort, either elk or buffalo, so as to lay in a stock."

"Here is a place that looks as though it would afford shelter from the storm among these fissures in the rock," announced Dick, which declaration brought cheer to the heart of Roger.

A little investigation, the best that conditions allowed, showed them that they could enter one of the fissures and avoid the sweep of the rising

wind that was now causing the snow to blow in sheets.

Determined to do all in their power to obtain some comfort, they selected the best shelter, and then crept within. Roger was the first to discover some scattered bits of wood lying around, a tree that grew further up the abrupt face of the mountain having dropped some of its branches.

Accordingly they obtained a light by means of the tinderbox and flint and steel. This enabled them to collect some of the fuel, and in the end they had a cheery fire.

Sitting near this for an hour made them so sleepy that they were glad to roll over wherever they chanced to be, and give themselves up to slumber.

The snow continued to fall heavily during the balance of the night. The wind howled through the adjacent trees in a mournful fashion, but within that fissure all was peaceful.

Once or twice the old frontiersman would awaken on feeling cold, and toss more fuel on the smoldering embers of the fire, after which he would again lie down.

So morning found them. They would not have known that the day had come if Dick had

not made his way to the mouth of the fissure and looked out. Apparently some hunter instinct had warned him that sleeping time had passed.

The snow was falling as thickly as ever. There was already a foot, and more, of it on the ground. Up on the mountain, where a previous fall had remained, it probably was twice as deep.

To go out while the storm prevailed was hardly wise, much as the boys wanted to be on the move.

Dick had taken note of certain things while the French trader was talking to them, and particularly of the fact that, when Lascelles spoke of the "other camp" in which Jasper Williams was held a prisoner, he had, possibly unconsciously, nodded toward the east.

It was in that direction the great lake lay of which they had heard so much, and from one thing and another Dick came to the conclusion that the camp must be located on the border of this large body of water.

Roger was looking anxiously at the meager stock of meat which Mayhew had produced from his pockets. There might be enough to satisfy their present hunger, but, once it was gone, the future did not seem very inviting.

They cooked it as on the former occasion.

“And it tastes much better than that the Indians gave us,” Roger asserted, for the Blackfeet took little pains to keep the meat from scorching, and this had given it a taste not at all pleasant to the boys.

All too soon was breakfast over, and the last scrap of meat devoured. Roger heaved a sigh of regret as he wiped his mouth on the back of his hand.

“I wish I knew where we would get the next bite,” he remarked. “It seems to me we eat in queer places on this trip. But I wouldn’t mind that so much if I only felt sure there *would* be another meal.”

After that they sat around and talked as they attended to the fire. Now and then one of them would get up to make another hunt for fuel, the stock of which was beginning to get low.

It was far from a pleasant prospect staring them in the face. The wonder was how Dick could appear to be so cheerful through it all, and keep on saying he felt certain it would all come out right in the end.

Roger at least had the good sense to keep his fears to himself. Whenever he felt that he

could almost give a shout, such was the nervous tension under which he was laboring, he would jump up and busy himself in hunting wood. In action he managed to gain control over his nerves, so that he could resume his seat, and once more listen to what the others were debating.

Plans were gravely discussed. To hear Dick laying these out one would never dream that they were based upon such a slender shred of hope. Two charges in their guns; many days' journey from the home camp; surrounded by mysterious workings of Nature calculated to make most men flee in terror; sought after by a revengeful French trader and his Indian allies; and now overtaken by a snowstorm that promised to make traveling additionally difficult—what a prospect for two half-grown lads and a single man to face!

The last time Dick came back from making an investigation as to the conditions outside, he brought a little satisfactory news. The snow was falling in diminished volume, and there was a promise that by another hour it might cease entirely. Then they could issue forth, and begin to beat their way toward that section of the country where they believed the big lake to lie.

Hardly had he imparted this information than they were startled by a deep roaring noise from without. It seemed as though the foundations of the mountain were shaken and, remembering what a strange country they were in, Roger could hardly be blamed for starting up with a cry of alarm.

The light that came in through the mouth of the fissure suddenly gave way to darkness; only the flickering gleam of their fire remaining to show them which way to move.

“Oh, what has happened now?” asked Roger, and as usual Dick seemed to know.

“It is a snow avalanche,” he told them, “and I am afraid it has blocked our only means of leaving here, so that we are once more prisoners!”

CHAPTER XXV

THE SNOW AVALANCHE

“A snow avalanche!” echoed Roger. “Do you mean it has come down from the side of the mountain, and filled the opening we used to get in here?”

“Yes,” explained Dick, “that is what has happened, as near as I can tell. But, after all, it may not be so serious a thing. We will see what can be done about breaking through.”

“We have to get out some way or other, that’s sure!” declared Roger, as he hurried along after his cousin, now heading for the place where the exit had been.

This was now filled by a tightly-wedged mass of snow. When they thrust the butts of their guns against it they were amazed to discover how firmly it had become packed.

“Why, it is like so much ice!” exclaimed Roger.

“Almost,” added the more conservative Dick, “though you can dig into it by working hard.

If we only had shovels here we might do something."

"But how long ought it take us to burrow through?" demanded Roger, with a note of dismay in his voice.

"That depends on how thick the wedge turns out to be," replied Dick. "If it is five feet, we could make it in an hour or so. If deeper through than that, it would take us much longer."

"And the worst of it is we haven't a scrap of food along with us," Roger complained. "If we were well supplied in that way I'd think it of less importance."

"We must get out, one way or another," continued Dick, grimly, "and the first thing we ought to learn is where the weakest part of the blockade lies."

"As it came down on the run," Roger figured, "it seems to me the greatest amount of snow would gather at the base. How about that, Dick?"

"You are right, and it will pay us to attack the barrier as high up as we can get. There may be some sticks of wood left back yonder, which we can use to dig with. Let us take a look."

A close search produced three fragments of branches that could be utilized as makeshift shovels; at least they would be able to dig after a fashion into the hard barrier, and then collect the loosened material by scooping it up in their hands to be thrown away.

It promised to be slow and painful work, but none of them dreamed of complaining. There was so much at stake that even Roger had to forget his natural feelings and devote himself to vigorous work.

First of all Dick climbed up the best way he could, and found out how they could secure a footing in order to attack the snow blockade higher up. When this had once been settled they began.

Since all of them could not get at the small space marked out, they tried it in relays. While two dug the third one rested; and when one of the others gave out he took the vacant place.

The fire dwindled away and finally seemed to go out entirely. They could spare no time in order to search for more fuel; besides, while devoting every energy to the task before them, none of them felt at all cold.

“What are the prospects, Dick?” asked

Roger, as he hastened to take the other's place in turn, having had a good rest.

"It strikes me the snow is packed lighter than what we struck at first; what do you think about it, Mayhew?"

The frontiersman was always willing to advance an opinion after it had been asked, though he would seldom speak first. So now he stopped to take in a few good breaths, and then made reply.

"I was just thinking the same way myself, to tell you the truth. And it goes to show that we must be getting near the outside, where the pressure is much less."

"Then we may break through at any time; is that it?" asked Dick.

After a short time Roger gave utterance to a shout.

"I'm through the layer of packed snow!" he exclaimed jubilantly. "See, here is a place where a stick cuts into it as easy as it would through a pear. We have won out, Dick; and in a little while we ought to see the outside world again."

On investigation it was discovered that there was good reason for Roger's jubilation. They had bored through the bank of snow that filled

the opening, thanks to the wisdom shown in attacking it at its weakest point.

Five minutes afterwards a hole had been made sufficiently large to allow of their crawling through it to freedom.

The snow had ceased falling, although there did not seem to be a break in the clouds overhead. It was much over a foot on the level, and in some places, where the wind had drifted it, they found it would pay them to go around rather than wade directly through.

“That way leads to where we had our bitter experience last night,” said Dick, as he pointed toward the southwest. “We do not want to see Lascelles and his red allies again, if we can help it, so we will not turn in that direction.”

“If we ever do have to meet him face to face,” added Roger, “let us hope it will be when we have plenty of powder and bullets for our guns. If the cowardly rascal had not kept himself hidden behind that tree, while the fight was going on, I would have made sure that my lead found him. He is the worst enemy our families know, for he would rob them of their homes.”

“I felt the same way,” confessed Dick; “but he was too smart for us. I think he must have guessed he would be the first target for our

guns. Still, we must remember that even Lascelles is not as bad as he might be. He would not allow the Indians to kill us on the spot, for one thing, as some renegades would have done."

"Well, after all," Roger continued, "it is a question in my mind whether he saved us because he had a streak of decency in him, or for some other reason. Perhaps he meant we should be carried off by those Blackfeet to their village, and adopted into the tribe."

"It might be as you say," admitted Dick, "for he told us that was what he meant them to do with Jasper Williams. It would be getting well rid of troublesome enemies, because there would be little chance of our ever coming back."

"Now that we have burrowed out of that trap, what is the next move, Dick?"

"I think we have decided already that we will not start back to the camp. Badly off as we are, we have come a long way after Williams, and, now that we know he is not a great many miles away, we must find him!"

"If what that trader said is true Jasper needs us, too," declared Roger.

"If he is a prisoner we are bound to do all we can to rescue him," said the other boy, al-

though it required no little fortitude to be able to decide in this way.

In one direction lay comfort and safety; in the other direction they must expect to find danger in many shapes, privations such as hunger and exhaustion, and, for aught they knew, death itself might lie in wait. Yet, in spite of all this, neither Dick nor Roger hesitated.

“Then it is on with us to the Frenchmen’s camp!” said Roger.

It was in that spirit they made their start. Just how far away the mysterious sheet of water lay they could not tell. It might be three miles, it might be twenty, for all they knew. Vague stories concerning it had drifted into the explorers’ camp from various sources. Trappers who had caught a glimpse of it gave wonderful accounts concerning its vast extent. Indians recounted the most marvelous tales of its being the home of the mighty Evil Spirit that possessed the Enchanted Land.

The boys were not free from a certain amount of superstitious awe; for human nature had not progressed as far along certain lines a hundred years ago as in these later days. But they possessed bold hearts, and, animated by that single purpose of serving those they loved, they were

willing to dare anything rather than give up the quest.

It was in this frame of mind, then, that they began heading into the east, trudging uncomplainingly through heaps of snow that often came to their waists, and keeping a constant lookout for either game or human enemies.

CHAPTER XXVI

TRACKING A BUFFALO

“THEY are all snowed under, I fear, Dick!” Roger thus remarked after they had been struggling along for some time, without seeing a living thing save some crows that flew over the tree-tops, cawing at the three palefaces as though scornfully demanding to know what they were doing so far away from their kind.

“If you mean the small animals, such as rabbits, foxes, mink and such,” Dick answered, “I suppose it is so, though in time they must work their way through the snow or die. But elk can move around still. They are broad-chested and able to bound over or break through the drifts.”

“Then why have we failed to see a single elk, or a lone buffalo?” asked Roger, as though he took it as a personal grievance.

“I can only give a guess at the answer.”

“And I’m sure it will be a good guess then, Dick, for you seem to study the habits of every-

thing that moves, from a beaver building his dam to the antelope we coax up within gunshot by waving a red piece of cloth. What do you think is the reason all big game is lacking about here?"

"The animals must know of some places, more favored than others," Dick explained, "where the grass stays fairly green throughout the winter. Snows may come and melt, and the cold waves be tempered by hot springs every little while."

"Then I wish we could run across another of those boiling springs before it gets dark, and find a herd of elk hanging around it," and Roger undoubtedly meant every word he spoke.

As the day had been pretty well along when they managed to break out of their snow prison they could not hope, before night, to get any great distance on the way to the big lake.

This being the case, it was really a matter of greater importance to Dick and his two companions that they succeed in their quest for food than that they cover any considerable distance before camping.

The prospect of another long night, without a morsel of food to stay the pangs of hunger, appalled them. Dick himself felt badly about it,

although he managed, as usual, to hide his growing disappointment better than Roger, partly for the sake of cheering the other up.

“There is one thing none of us seem to have noticed,” Dick observed, after another half hour had crept by; “the clouds have broken, and we may even see the sun before it sets.”

“That is certainly cheering news,” Roger returned; “because if we had another fall of snow on top of this, winter would set in ‘for keeps.’ And we did hope to be safe back in camp before that.”

Before Dick could make any further remark an exclamation from Mayhew drew the attention of the two lads. The guide happened to be a little ahead of them at the time, and was now seen to be beckoning eagerly.

“He must have struck the trail of an elk at last!” exclaimed Roger, showing all the signs of the eager hunter.

“It looks that way,” admitted his cousin, “because he seems to be pointing down at his feet, as though something he had discovered interested him.”

“Oh! I hope it turns out that way, and that if it is a trail it was not made by a file of reds, or some of those ugly French trappers.”

They were hurrying forward while exchanging these remarks, and speedily reached Mayhew's side.

"What is it?" asked Roger, immediately.

"A fresh trail!" came the answer, and, looking down, the boys could see for themselves where some large animal had pushed through the deep snow.

"An elk?" Dick inquired.

"No, a buffalo, I believe," came the reply.

"One or the other, what do we care, so long as we can bag him?" commented Roger. "So let us be on the move. Every minute counts, with the sun so low in the western sky, and night coming on."

There was indeed need of haste, for the short afternoon would soon be gone and, unless they had the good fortune to overtake the stray buffalo within half an hour or so, all their hopes would be dashed.

They immediately started forward; but the depth of the snow in places retarded their progress, and Roger often drew long breaths that stood for impatience, for he dared not vent his feelings aloud.

Dick, who was always observing little things, discovered that the breeze favored them. The

buffalo was heading up into the quarter whence the wind came. This is the habit of most animals, since it allows them an opportunity to scent any lurking danger ahead, such as a panther stretched on a limb and waiting to spring upon them in passing.

Mayhew, who was a first-class tracker, every now and then took a look at the trail as though to decide what chance they had of overtaking the struggling buffalo before night fell.

He made no comment, but Dick, who watched his face, felt that the guide did not feel any too sanguine. Evidently from certain signs, well known to one of his broad experience, Mayhew knew that they were still some distance in the rear of the quarry and that, unless for some reason the lone buffalo chose to stop while on his way to a feeding ground, there was little likelihood of their coming up with him.

Accordingly, Dick was already making up his mind to "grin and bear it," as Uncle Sandy was in the habit of saying when things could not be changed, and he had to stand for whatever came along.

Roger kept a bright lookout ahead. He hoped to be the first to discover the huge animal outlined against the white snow. Perhaps Roger

had even figured in his mind just how they would approach as near as they could, and then, when their presence was discovered, and the buffalo tried to escape, they would give chase.

If the animal was tired after floundering so long through the deep drifts they would likely soon be able to come up with him, when a single shot might do the business. Roger did not forget that their ammunition was low, and that it would never do for them to be wasteful of powder and ball.

The sun presently shone forth, but it was close down to the top of the ridge far to the west, and liable to dip out of sight at any time.

"The sun has set!" said Roger, presently, in a tone of bitter disappointment.

"And we will have to give up soon, I fear," Dick told him; "because, while meat would be a fine thing to have, we must first of all think of passing the night without being frozen to death."

"It is going to be cold, that's a fact," admitted Roger, trying to show that he could grapple with the situation and not betray weakness.

Mayhew took a last look at the tracks, while the boys awaited his decision with the deepest

anxiety. When they saw the guide shake his head in the negative they knew luck had gone against them, and that this meant a supperless camp.

"We have gained a heap on the critter," Mayhew declared, "but he was still going strong when he passed here."

"How long ago?" asked Dick.

"Nigh on half an hour, I should judge," came the answer.

"Then we must call quits, and devote all our attention to finding a camp," Dick determined. "With a fire going we will not feel quite so badly as in the cold."

"Then we mean to keep up a blaze all night, no matter what the risk?" demanded Roger.

"Of course we can try to hide the fire some," explained the guide; "but on a cold night like this the reds are not apt to be moving, and the risk will be slight."

"Well, if the rest can stand it, I ought to, so now let us begin in earnest to find a camping-ground," and Roger started looking to the right and left as though he did not want to lose a minute.

Indeed, at that season of the year in this far northern clime, while the twilight might linger

for an hour or more, once the sun had set they could not see well under the canopy of pines. These, in places, had kept much of the snow from reaching the ground, and there was a reasonable hope that they could run across some spot that offered shelter from the piercing night wind.

Mayhew was so well versed in backwoods lore that he could be depended on to locate such a camp ground. If necessary they could build a windbreak out of branches, and behind this make their fire.

Before long the guide gave them to understand that he had sighted what seemed to be an admirable spot for passing the night.

“Over yonder you can see where I mean,” he told them, pointing as he spoke; and even Roger was forced to admit that it offered advantages other places had lacked.

Mayhew took his hatchet and cut several slabs from the bark of a tree. It was to be noticed that he did this on the side nearest their intended camp; but neither of the pioneer boys asked why this was done, because their hunter instinct told them Mayhew was only leaving his mark so that in the morning they would lose no time in picking up the trail of the lone buffalo.

Once they arrived at the spot selected as their next camp all started to work. Dick and Mayhew began to erect a thick screen of brush on the windward side, while Roger collected fuel wherever he could find it.

When he had made quite a pile of broken limbs, and splinters from a fallen pine tree, Roger got out his tinder-box and flints, and presently the rising smoke told that his fire was a success.

As the night closed in around them it was a rather cheery scene that Roger looked upon, while engaged in gathering a further supply of wood, perhaps twenty or thirty paces away. His two companions were still engaged in adding the finishing touches to the barricade; the flames leaped up with a snap and a sparkle, and the glow of the fire seemed to give the surrounding snow a rosy tint that did much to take away its cold look.

Roger sighed as he tightened his belt, drawing it up another notch, a familiar habit with hungry men.

"I think we will have to call this Camp Starvation, Dick," he remarked, as he threw down the armful of fuel he had collected.

"No, that would hardly be a proper name for

it," the other told him immediately; "because we haven't reached that point yet. I mean to put it down in my memory as Camp Hope!"

Roger must have been abashed by the gentle reproach in Dick's declaration, for he did not make any reply until several minutes had passed. Perhaps he may have been weighing in his mind the many reasons they had to be thankful, in spite of the dark clouds hanging over their heads, for when he did speak up it was to say:

"Yes, we will call it Camp Hope, Dick."

CHAPTER XXVII

FIRE FANCIES

PERHAPS they were taking some chances as they sat there by their fire that evening; but there was no help for it. Being without blankets or any furs to keep them warm when sleep overcame them, they dared not risk being frozen as the cold became more intense with the passing of the night.

Roger meant to show as cheery a face as he could, but somehow he could not seem to think of anything but the delights of eating. It is doubtless so with all who have been deprived of their customary food for an unusual time.

“Do you know, Dick,” he said, as he sat hugging his knees and staring into the crackling flames, “I was just thinking how, many a night, when the wind would be whistling around the corners of our cabin, Sister Mary and myself used to sit and look into a roaring fire like this, one on either side of the big hearth. I can picture her sitting there to-night, with mother and

father close by. And, Dick, perhaps they are talking about us, wondering whether they will ever see us again."

Dick moved uneasily as he listened, for, to tell the truth, his thoughts had also gone roaming back to the dearly loved home, and in imagination he was following the forms of his mother, father and brother, as they moved to and fro in the well-remembered living room.

Immediately afterwards Roger's plaint took another turn, induced no doubt by the feeling of emptiness that caused him such uneasiness.

"Yes, and it seems to me I can even catch the fine odor of the stew that is cooking in the big black pot swinging over the fire, with the lid lifting to let out the clouds of steam. And oh! Dick, how splendid it used to smell, too! What wouldn't I give to be sitting down with a plate of it heaped up before me, some of mother's tea in a tin cup and a plate of her fried sweet-cakes to top off with."

Once Roger got started on that strain he seemed to take especial delight in recollections of about every feast in which he had ever indulged. Dick let him talk on undisturbed. How vividly he himself could recall all those special occasions, when they had attended some

country dance among the settlers' young folks at harvest home times. The faces of all the absent friends came clearly before him and, spurred on by Roger's graphic descriptions, it seemed almost possible to get a whiff of the fresh bread being taken from the big old Dutch oven in which, as a small child, Dick had so often hidden from his companions when they played games.

Roger prattled on as the hour grew late. It seemed as though his recollections had no limit, judging from the way in which he kept calling up events of happy days.

But finally Dick began to notice that he faltered now and then, and his eyes gave evidences of approaching drowsiness. The warmth of the fire was getting in its work and in the end Roger stretched out, "just to rest his back a bit," as he explained to his companions. He soon began to breathe regularly and Dick knew that he slept.

For a time at least the hungry boy would forget his gnawing pains, though possibly his dreams would take on the joys of a feast, and the awakening be all the more bitter in consequence.

"Poor Roger!" Dick said to himself, as he

leaned over and gently drew the flap of the sleeper's tunic closer about his neck, "I wish I had it in my power to provide a substantial meal against your waking up; but where it is to come from, unless it rains down from above, I fail to see."

It was just like the generous nature of Dick Armstrong to forget his own condition in feeling for another; Roger was as dear to him as his own brother could be, since they had shared each other's joys and sorrows ever since they were able to exchange confidences and fight each other's battles.

That long night would never be forgotten, though they lived to an old age. Little sleep visited Dick's eyes. This came partly from his sense of hunger, but also on account of the serious condition that confronted them.

Their long quest seemed to have been wrecked on the rocks, and that after success had appeared to crown their efforts, which made it all the harder to bear. Although Dick would not appear downcast while Roger could see his face, he had numerous doubts to wrestle with in the silence of the night, and secretly groaned in spirit many times.

During his wakeful hours he often caught the

distant howling of a wolf pack. This coming of the first deep snow of the winter would make their task of securing daily food the more difficult, and it seemed to the listener that there was an additional mournfulness to those long-drawn sounds.

Once he also caught the scream of some other beast in the pine woods. Although it was not repeated, Dick believed it must have come from a panther seeking his prey amidst the snowy aisles of the forest.

Mayhew, too, must have been wakeful, for several times when Dick happened to be dozing he arose and threw more wood on the fire.

When the stars told Dick morning was at hand he felt as though a terrible load had been taken from his mind. With ten hours of daylight before them they must surely be able to obtain meat and satisfy their craving for food.

While the other two were sitting cross-legged by the fire, and talking in low tones, Roger suddenly sat up. He stared hard at them, and dug his knuckles into his eyes, as though he could not believe what he saw.

Dick knew from the indications that he must have been far away in his sleep, and that the disappointment struck him cruelly.

“So, it was all a dream after all, and mother was not calling me to get up or the griddle cakes would be cold?” Roger remarked, dolefully. “Oh, how fine they used to taste, with that wild honey smeared over them! Do you remember the time when we brought in four heaping buckets of honey from that bee-tree up on Juniper Creek, and how my left eye was closed by a sting? But never was there such sweet stuff. And to think that we have to go without a bite of breakfast this cold morning!”

“Just as soon as it gets a little lighter,” said Dick, “we will be on the move.”

“Searching for something to eat, you mean, don’t you?”

“Yes, whether it is that stray buffalo, or an elk, we will not be very particular which,” the other declared.

“Why, I think I could eat a—a wolf, almost, I’m that caved in,” declared Roger, and no doubt he meant it, too.

The dawn was at hand. Eagerly they watched the pink flush spreading across the eastern sky. With a change in the wind they could hear a distinct muttering sound, and it was easy to picture some gushing geyser in action, perhaps miles away.

Just as soon as they could see without trouble they turned their backs on Camp Hope, and were soon following the trail of the buffalo.

“If I thought we would have any trouble about getting a supply of wood, so as to start a fire in a hurry after we get our meat,” Roger observed before they abandoned the camp, “I’d be tempted to tote some of this good fuel on my back.”

“No need of doing anything like that,” Dick assured him. “If there is anything that is plentiful around here it is fuel for a fire. I already have some small bits of choice stuff laid away for a time of need.”

The wind had shifted the surface of the dry snow to some extent, so that in places they found the tracks of the buffalo almost covered. But Mayhew was a born trailer, and found no difficulty in following the animal.

“You see,” he told the boys at one time, “this may be a good thing for us, because we can tell where the beast started fresh this morning.”

It was not twenty minutes after he made this remark when the scout joyously showed them where the buffalo had spent the night. They could plainly see the imprint of his hairy coat in the snow where he had lain down. The cold

had no particular terror for such a rugged beast and, as he went on in about the same general direction as his previous trail, they believed they were right in assuming that the buffalo, through instinct, knew where forage was to be found, and was heading thither.

All possible haste was now made by the three pursuers. It meant much to them that they presently overtake the quarry, or else run upon some other game.

Roger was already feeling weak from lack of food. Only his will power enabled him to keep alongside the others in that hot chase. He strained his vision to the utmost, in the endeavor to be the first to discover signs of the welcome presence of the big animal with the shaggy mane, which it seemed was their only hope of staving off starvation.

When crows again flew overhead and continued their scornful cawing, Roger several times aimed his empty gun up at them, as though he would have liked to give the impudent birds of ill omen something to remember him by.

“I really believe they must know we have so little ammunition that nothing could tempt us to waste a grain of powder on them this day,”

he declared, angrily, when the clamor of crow scolding grew worse.

“Oh! at another time you would hardly pay any attention to them,” Dick told him. “Just now all of us feel a bit nervous, and ugly. Let them scold if it does them any good. We haven’t yet reached the point where we could eat crow, even if we felt like wasting a shot on one.”

It was sensible advice, and, just as Dick prophesied, the noisy flock was soon left in their wake.

“I’ve heard some queer stories about crows,” Mayhew remarked, “and how they even hold a court to try some bird that has been bad. Once I found a crow hanging by the neck dead in a wild grape-vine. Of course I could never tell if it got there by accident, or was hanged by its mates; but lots of people I told the story to said it looked mighty suspicious.”

Dick laughed a little at that, but went on:

“I’ve sat in the woods many a time, myself, and watched a gathering of crows. It seemed as though they came by squads from everywhere until there were hundreds fluttering about the trees. And such a terrible noise they kept up! It made me think of school when we have spell-

ing bees, and everybody is trying to call out at the same time."

"Yes," added Roger, trying to take some interest in things that would cause him to forget his misery for even a brief period of time, "and then they would fly off in a great cloud, dodging this way and that as though it might be an army going to attack the fort of an enemy. Yes, they are queer birds; but I don't like them to make fun of me when I'm sick for something to eat."

"They acted to me as if they were warning us to go back!" suggested Mayhew, a little uneasily. "I wonder why, and if there's anything up this way that would give us trouble."

"It's open country just here," said Roger, "and nothing terrible in sight. But I'd give a heap if we could only overtake that loping buffalo. You said a while ago, didn't you, Mayhew, that he could only be fifteen minutes or so ahead of us?"

"That is what his tracks tell me," the guide assented, "and we are coming up on him all the while. If we fail to see him in the next half hour I will be a disappointed man."

"Why, I must be getting weak on my pins, for it seems as if the ground was trembling un-

der me!" declared Roger, showing signs of sudden alarm.

Dick and the guide exchanged hasty glances. Apparently they were feeling something of a similar nature, but could not lay it to the same cause as Roger.

"It is getting much worse now," cried Mayhew, "and I can hear a terrible grumbling down underneath me that I must say I don't like over much!"

All of them were by this time aroused to a sense of their sudden peril; but it was Dick who voiced the alarming truth.

"Run for your lives!" he shouted, "it must be a boiling fountain about to burst, and we are right on top of the crater!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

WITH HOPEFUL HEARTS

FORGOTTEN at that minute were all their other troubles, as each made hurried efforts to get away from the spot. The trembling of the rocks told plainly enough that some convulsion of nature was about to take place; and Dick's words gave evidence that he himself had discovered where the yawning crater of the boiling spring lay amidst the half melted snow.

Hardly had they gone back some thirty or forty feet when there burst forth a vast volume of spray and steaming water that ascended high into the air, reaching an altitude of possibly five score feet before it lost its velocity, and began to rain downward.

Immediately the snow around the entire vicinity commenced to melt with the heat of the falling water. With the sunlight falling on the wonderful fountain the two boys thought they had never in all their lives seen anything so sublime.

Mayhew was more alarmed than pleased by

the spectacle. Its terror appealed more to his backwoods nature than any beauty connected with the display. Indeed, had he been there alone, the chances were Mayhew would have taken to his heels, not being desirous of such close acquaintance with things he could not comprehend.

After staring at the magical fountain for a brief time Roger once more allowed his other nature to have sway.

"We are losing precious minutes, Dick!" he called out, for the roar was so great that it was impossible to be heard unless the voice were elevated. "This may be all very fine, but it doesn't seem to satisfy the gnawing sensation inside me."

When Dick gave the word, Mayhew only too gladly once more led off.

"That buffalo must have known of this hot fountain, because he came straight up to where it is," Roger remarked, after they had left the spouting geyser behind them.

"Yes, but it seems that it rises only at long intervals," Dick explained. "It may be that days pass without an outburst. That accounts for the snow around, which disappeared so fast once the flow of hot water began."

Roger seemed content to accept this version of the strange happening. In fact it was now a past matter with him; his most urgent necessity did not concern wonderful fountains at all, but provender. He had a constant reminder with him that "nature abhors a vacuum," and that an empty stomach gives its owner no peace.

"If we had stood where we were," said Dick, "the chances are some of us might have been well cooked. My heart seemed to jump up in my throat when you stumbled, Roger; but you managed to recover your balance and come on."

"I confess that I was a bit worried myself about that time, Dick; but as a rule I'm not so clumsy. Just now my legs seem weak and wobbly. It must be that hunger is getting a good grip on me."

"All's well that ends well, they say," ventured Mayhew, stealing a backward look over his shoulder at the still spouting geyser that filled him with such uneasiness.

"When the buffalo found this place all covered with snow," continued Roger, "so he could get not a mouthful of grass or fodder, he started off again in the same general direction. Where do you reckon he is striking out for now, Dick?"

"Oh, I suppose he knows of other places

where he can feed, and is headed for one of them," was the answer Dick gave.

"There, the noise is dying down back of us," Mayhew announced. "It seems as though the show is over for this time. Yes, the column of hot water and steam is only half as high, and getting less right along."

"It may lie quiet for another spell, perhaps days, before it breaks out again," suggested Dick, which remark proved that he was arriving at some conclusion respecting these remarkable geysers, in that he believed they all had regular cycles for displaying their activities, some frequent, others at much longer intervals, but all working with clock-like fidelity.

Roger had already quite forgotten all about the recent scare. Once more he was keeping his eyes on the alert for signs of that lone buffalo which would mean so much to them.

He had pictured the animal so many times in his fancy that pretty soon the tortured boy began "seeing things" that did not really exist.

"Look yonder, Dick," he would say huskily, "and tell me is that the old bull just alongside that rock? Seems as though I can make out his head as he stands there. Hadn't we better spread out, so as to surround him?"

When Dick assured Roger that what he took to be the head of the buffalo was only an outcropping of the massive rock the other seemed deeply disappointed.

“I was dead sure it must be our game, Dick, indeed I was. But now I see you are right, and it is a part of the rocky spur. How about that brush heap ahead there; I may have been mistaken, Dick, but I thought I could see something moving. It is too low down to hide a big buffalo, but Indians might be lying there, waiting to knock us over. I hope they have some pemmican along with them, for we could take it away, you see, Dick; and even dry pemmican would taste pretty good now.”

Dick began to feel a little worried about his cousin. It seemed to him as though Roger was getting light-headed on account of his privations.

“Oh! if only we could catch up with that miserable buffalo bull,” Dick muttered to himself as he tramped along. “Either that, or else run across an elk. Something has got to happen soon, or I’m afraid Roger will keel over, or perhaps go out of his mind.”

The situation was getting more desperate. Try as he would, Dick could discover no way

in which it might be alleviated. They must keep on constantly and hope that before long they would come up with the animal they had been tracking with the pertinacity of wolves.

He knew they were not making anything like the progress they could have had to their credit if they had partaken of their customary portion of food. Weakness had seized upon them, and, while the spirit was willing, the flesh seemed to be lacking in the power to obey as promptly as they would have liked.

Roger continued to discover suspicious objects from time to time. Then his mood would change, and he could be heard laughing softly to himself, as though the whole thing was appearing to him now in the guise of a great joke.

“Poor fellow!” muttered Dick, when one of these spasms had passed off, leaving Roger more morose than ever; “somehow he seems to feel it so much more than either of us. I’ve got to the last hole in my belt now, and I hope there may be no need of my making a fresh one.”

When he looked toward Mayhew he saw that the scout’s face had begun to show signs of renewed eagerness. This gave Dick a thrill, as hope once more commenced to flutter in his breast. Certainly Mayhew would not look like

that unless he had good reason to believe they were now close upon the heels of the roving buffalo.

Then Mayhew raised a warning finger; at the same time he nodded his head toward the muttering Roger. Dick comprehended the action; it meant that some means should be taken to keep the other quiet, lest he warn their quarry of their coming long before there was any necessity of such a happening, and thus endanger the success of their stalking game.

Accordingly Dick hastened to get alongside his cousin. He laid a hand on Roger's arm, and the other, raising his head, turned a pair of red eyes upon Dick.

"Keep still, Roger!" hissed Dick, holding up a finger. "Mayhew says we are right on the heels of the game. You must not speak a single word above a whisper, or all may be ruined. Do you understand what I am saying?"

"Of course I do, Dick," began the other, cautiously, as though aroused by the joyous news, and coming back to his senses again. "I hope you are not thinking me silly just because I've been complaining of feeling hungry?"

"Never mind, now, it's going to be all right," said Dick, soothingly, for he was afraid Roger

might want to argue the matter with him. "As you have an empty gun you must let us do the work."

"Oh, never fear about me, I understand!"

"Well, keep still now, Roger. Not another word, but hold yourself ready to start that fire soon. If you listen hard you may hear the horn blow for dinner like it does at home when we are out in the field. Silence now, Mayhew must think he sees our game."

Indeed, the actions of the guide would give any one to understand something like that. He was moving along with his body bent over, and gripping his faithful rifle in both hands. Although both of the boys used their eyes to the best advantage they could not see anything to hearten them; but then the strain on their nerves, because of all that blinding snow, may have had something to do with this failure.

Mayhew turned quickly toward them. He said not a word, but his lips moved, and he nodded his head in a manner that thrilled the boys.

It had long ago been decided just what their tactics should be in case they were so fortunate as to come up with the quarry. Neither of them meant to fire until they had managed to get so

close to the game that one shot alone would be necessary to bring the animal down.

Of course, when their presence was discovered, the buffalo would start off at as brisk a pace as possible, in order to escape from his human enemies. They believed, however, the animal must be nearly tired out from breasting the deep drifts so long, and that its burst of speed could not last any great while.

If it became absolutely necessary, they were prepared to risk everything on a long-distance shot, and the hope of wounding the animal. This would hasten its halting at least, when it could be dispatched at their pleasure, even though they used knife and hatchet to accomplish this.

Roger must have been greatly impressed with what Dick had said to him, for he remained perfectly still after that, at least so far as giving voice to his feelings was concerned.

Dick had pushed on ahead of his cousin, as he had announced he intended to do on account of holding one of the loaded guns. Side by side with Mayhew he now advanced along the fresh trail. Even a novice could see that some animal must have passed only a few minutes before, for there were places where snow actually fell over

into the tracks, as though it had been balanced on the edge of the depression.

The anxious waiting that almost made them sick at heart ended at last. Dick caught a scuffling sound that came from beyond the next line of bushes. Something was moving there, and he could easily imagine that the hungry buffalo, scenting some sort of grass under the snow, might be trying to get down to it.

Bending lower still, they pushed on, with eyes glued on the spot where those significant sounds came from. In another minute they would be able to look over the tops of the bushes and see what lay beyond. Then, if all was well, a lucky shot would procure them the meat of which they were in such desperate need.

No one made a sound so far as Dick could tell, so it could not have been that which gave warning to the suspicious buffalo. Perhaps a shift in the wind carried some taint of their presence to his sensitive nostrils and aroused his fears.

However that might be, Dick heard a sudden snort, and then there came a shout of dismay from Roger, who, standing more erect than the rest, must have been able to see what was going on beyond the bushes.

“He’s on the run, Dick! Oh! hurry, and shoot, or he will get away from us!”

As Dick and Mayhew cleared the bushes with great bounds they saw the buffalo plunging into a deep drift and scattering the snow in every direction. But what thrilled the two hunters was the fact that, in dashing headlong into the drift, the beast had entered a trap from which escape would not be easy.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE HUNTERS' FEAST

“HEAD him off!” Roger called from the rear, while he made all haste to come up, even though he had an empty and useless gun, and could not be of any assistance to his comrades.

The others had gauged the situation, and realized that their best move was to follow directly after the animal, thus causing him to push deeper into the trap. The heavy fall of snow, that they had grumbled at so many times when struggling along knee-deep, now promised to be their best ally.

In this fashion they presently found themselves close upon the struggling bull. Floundering there he could not make much headway, and at last in desperation the animal started to turn upon his pursuers.

They knew well what the result might be if they allowed the charge to be carried out. One of them would be struck down by those wicked black horns that adorned the shaggy head; and,

worst of all, the animal was likely to escape, since Roger could do little or nothing to stay his flight over the back trail.

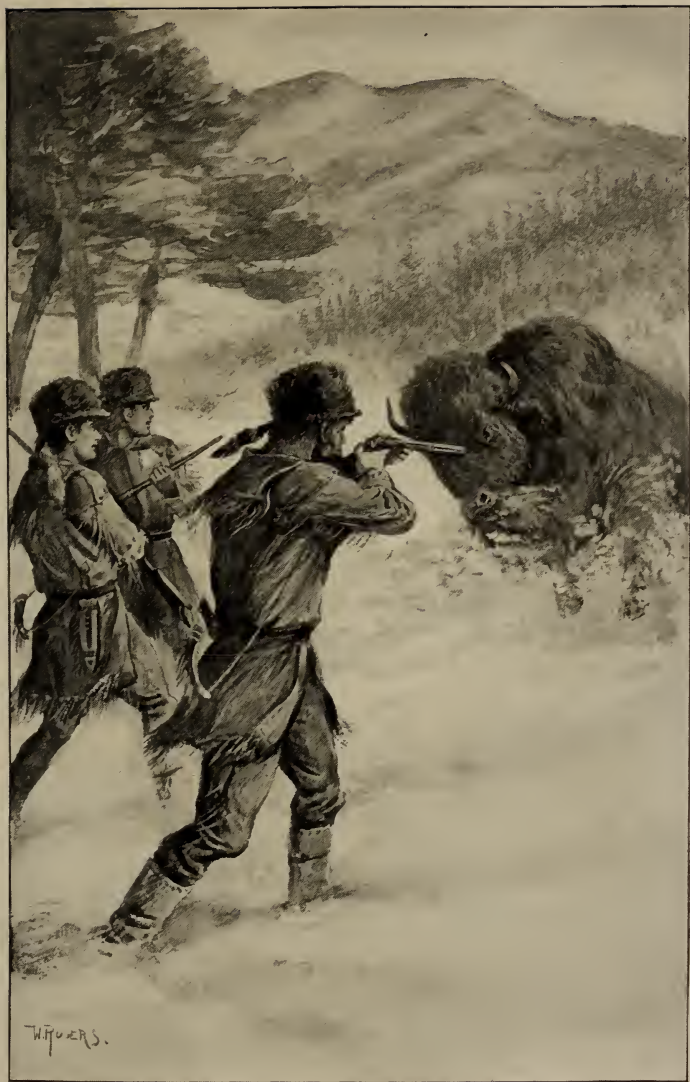
It had been arranged that Mayhew was to take the first shot, and they hoped one would be sufficient, with the backing of knife and hatchet. The buffalo was just in the act of turning when the frontiersman fired, and in consequence Mayhew could hardly have asked for a better showing, since one flank was wholly exposed.

At the time the marksman could not have been more than fifteen feet away, and a miss was out of the question. Mayhew had hunted these huge bison on numerous occasions, since he was one of those upon whom the exploring party depended for a regular supply of fresh meat.

This being the case, he knew exactly where to place his bullet in order to get the best results. As a consequence no sooner had he discharged his gun, and drawn his hatchet in order to be prepared for the worst, than he saw the animal stagger and fall in his tracks.

A vital spot must have been reached by the missile that was driven by that heavy charge of powder; for the long-barreled guns of the pioneers were powerful in their execution.

When Roger saw the quarry struggling in the



"THE BUFFALO WAS JUST IN THE ACT OF TURNING WHEN THE FRONTIERSMAN FIRED"

snow-drift his excitement became so great that he could not even shout, much as he felt like so doing. Hurrying toward the spot, he fastened his hungry eyes upon the animal whose efforts to rise were becoming more and more feeble.

Presently Mayhew, watching his chance, stepped briskly forward and with one well-aimed blow from the back of his hatchet finished the business.

"Hurrah!" gasped Roger, carried away by the importance of their well-earned victory.

No doubt delightful visions immediately began to flit through his brain, as in imagination he saw himself seated by a fire, and devouring ration upon ration of savory buffalo meat.

"Remember your part of the transaction, Roger!" warned Dick, as, knife in hand, he prepared to cut up the game.

"That means a fire!" answered the other, excitedly. "Hand me over the fine stuff you said you had packed up, Dick. Oh! you can depend on me to get things going in a hurry. There's a spot close by where I saw plenty of wood. The snow was blown away somehow or other. Give me a little time, and you will see smoke rising!"

Doubtless Roger had started scores, even hun-

dreds, of fires in his time; but it is certain that he never entered into the task with a lighter heart than on this particular occasion. His very soul seemed to be singing with joy as he hastily gathered up some of the wood most easily obtained, and then, picking a good spot, proceeded to use flint and steel with hopes of speedy results.

Finding that his very eagerness was delaying him, Roger called a halt, took himself to task, and after that settled down grimly to accomplishing his part of the proceedings without a hitch.

In a short time smoke began to curl upwards from his small beginning. Blowing the feeble blaze he quickly had it taking hold in earnest. The crackle and snap of the burning wood was music to the ears of the almost delirious boy.

“The fire is ready, Dick!” he called out.

“Then come for some of the meat, and commence business,” was the welcome answer.

As there was nothing that Mayhew could do to assist in carving the dead buffalo, he also was given various “hunks” of the meat, and presently the two sat there by the fire, attending to a dozen or more sticks, on the ends of which

their long-delayed meal was being slowly browned.

Never in all his life had Roger felt so frantic upon smelling the odor of cooking meat. It would have been just the same had their fare consisted of venison, bear meat, or wild turkey; all he wanted was something to satisfy that terrible craving which was overpowering him.

It must be confessed that Roger, unable to stand the suspense and temptation longer, snatched the first piece from its stick before it was half-cooked, and commenced to devour it like a savage.

He seemed to enjoy it, too, which fact caused the guide to speedily follow his example and appropriate one of the sections for himself.

Dick, coming up just then with a further supply, first of all filled the empty sticks with fresh portions, and then—well, Dick was just as hungry as either of his comrades, and there was really no sense in waiting any longer, so he made it unanimous!

After they had taken the sharp edge off their ravenous hunger the pace was not quite so swift. They were willing to wait until the meat was fairly well cooked; and by degrees it was noticed

that they even began to slacken in their attack.

At length Dick laughed as he remarked:

“I think I have reached my limit, and, as I hardly want to be called a glutton, I mean to quit.”

“One more piece will satisfy me—for a while at least,” Roger confessed.

The guide also admitted that he believed he could contain no more. Although possibly at another time Roger might have complained about the fresh meat being tough, no one heard him utter a single word against it on that occasion. It would be adding insult to injury to find fault with something that had really been the means of saving their lives.

“While we have this fire,” suggested Dick, “it would be a good idea to cook some more of the meat. We may not be able to start another blaze later on; the danger of being discovered and attacked might be too great. What do you think about it, Mayhew?”

“It is a sensible idea, I must say,” came the immediate reply.

As that settled it, Dick went over and proceeded to do some more work with his keen-edged blade. They meant to take considerable of the meat along with them at any rate; that

much had been decided on long before. With but another shot left between starvation and themselves, they could not afford to be wasteful when good luck had thrown a chance like this in their way.

Roger was quite a different sort of fellow, now that he no longer experienced the tortures of an unappeased appetite. He could even look hopefully into the future, and see glorious opportunities for carrying out their plan of campaign. As Dick had truly said, what they had done once could be accomplished again. Favored by the protecting hand of Providence, they must surely be able to get the better of that cruel and scheming French trader.

The big lake where the river had its source could not be many miles away from where they now stood. They would push steadily on, and, upon striking its shores, ascertain where the Frenchmen had their camp.

"They must have a fire in such cold weather," Roger argued, and the others agreed with him, glad to find that he was looking at matters so cheerfully. "And fire makes some kind of smoke, so we ought to be able to tell where it is. Then, when the night comes, we can creep up and set Jasper free."

How simple the program seemed now! The rocks heretofore appearing almost unsurmountable diminished in size, and no longer stood as a barrier that could not be scaled. A full stomach nearly always makes one see things in a rosy light.

Finally it was decided they had cooked a sufficient supply of meat. The balance that they expected to carry with them was made up in small packages enclosed in portions of the buffalo hide and tied securely with thongs.

As they were burdened with little save their guns, now almost useless to them, these packages would not prove troublesome. Roger was willing to load himself down with twice the amount, and bravely stagger under it all, rather than risk the chance of suffering again the misery he had endured.

"You feel sure the lake lies to the east of us, Mayhew, do you not?" Roger asked the guide when they were ready to start, feeling ever so much stronger, and able to push through the drifts where they could not be skirted.

"Yes, everything points that way," he was assured by Mayhew. "From the way that Frenchman pointed when he was talking to you both, Dick figured that the lake was off in that

direction. And then the crows fly that way in the morning, and return again in the evening. That is a pretty good sign, I take it."

Roger became interested at once. Here was something he had not thought of noticing, and consequently he wished for more information.

"Tell me why that should be so," he asked, as they started.

"These crows do not drift south in the winter time," explained the frontiersman. "They stay up here, and, as they must find feed when the earth is covered under many feet of snow, they have learned that along the shore of the big lake they can get what they need—dead fish and all sorts of other things cast up by the waves."

"But what if the lake freezes over, as it may do in very hard winters?" Roger questioned.

"Oh, they would still find things to eat on the ice," returned Mayhew. "Being an open stretch, the wind would keep the snow from settling there. But no matter, that is where they fly each morning; and you know what hunters say about a direct line being as 'straight as the crow flies.'"

"Mayhew is right, Roger," said Dick, "and the chances are as ten to one that we are heading straight for the big lake right now."

For some time they made steady progress. Possibly they covered as much as two miles when the guide was suddenly observed to come to a full stop. Both of the boys followed suit. They were not ten feet behind Mayhew, so it was possible for them to exchange words with him in low tones. Dick it was who found his voice first, for Roger grew so excited he became dumb for the time being.

“What is it, Mayhew?” asked Dick, half-elevating his gun, which contained the only charge of powder and lead they possessed, and under such conditions might be looked on as their sole means of defense in case of threatening peril.

“There are Injuns near by,” came the answer. “I saw a feathered head rise above yonder bush; and, as I live, there are others on either side of us. It looks as though we were surrounded!”

CHAPTER XXX

ALLIES WITH COPPER-COLORED SKINS

WHEN Mayhew made that dire announcement it sent a foreboding of coming trouble straight to the hearts of his young companions.

If the wily red men had succeeded in surrounding them, so that there was no chance of escape, they might as well give up all hope of saving themselves from capture. Poor Roger, who had so recently been brimming over with confidence concerning the ultimate success of their expedition to the camp of the Frenchmen, now found himself sinking once more into a pit of despair.

“What had we better do, Mayhew?” asked Dick, grimly.

“That is for you to decide,” replied the scout. “Each one will have to follow his own bent. As for myself, I know well that capture would mean death at the stake for me. So I shall fight to the last gasp, and, if the chance comes, try to make my escape as I did before. A man can die but once, and better in battle than by fire.”

Dick hardly knew what to say or do. He had a charge in his gun, it is true, and with ordinary luck that might account for a single Indian; but would it be the part of wisdom to enrage the savages by this rash act?

He turned to the right and to the left. Yes, even as Mayhew had said, there were enemies concealed everywhere, for he could see feathered heads rising from behind various sheltering bushes.

Flight seemed impossible, and, while the thought of surrender chilled his blood, it began to look as though there might be no other course.

Then all at once Roger heard his cousin give a low cry. It was not alarm that rang in that utterance, but rather sudden surprise, even hope. Roger could not guess what it meant, but turning toward his comrade, he seized hold of his arm and stared in the other's face.

To his amazement Roger saw what looked like an expanding smile beginning to appear there. He feared Dick must be going out of his mind when he could show signs of pleasure upon facing such a terrible condition as that by which they were now confronted.

"Mayhew, look again!" cried Dick. "Pay-closer attention to the feathers in their scalp-

locks! Tell me if they are not different from the feathers the Blackfeet wear!"

It was the frontiersman now who uttered a cry.

"Yes, yes, you are right, boy! These are not Blackfoot braves!"

"They are Sioux warriors, and, it may be, fresh from the village of our friend, the chief, Running Elk!" said Dick.

Roger found his voice at hearing that glorious news.

"Try them, Dick!" he exclaimed, excitedly. "Give them the sign the chief taught us! Let them know we are friends, and not enemies! Yes, I can tell the feathers are those of our friends, the Sioux. It is going to be all right after all!"

Dick meanwhile took out a piece of white linen he had with him and started to wave it.

At the same time he made certain gesticulations with his other hand that would have a meaning in the eyes of Sioux braves, if, as they hoped, these hidden red men proved to be such.

At first no notice was taken of his signals. Perhaps the wily warriors suspected that it might be some sort of trap to catch them un-

awares; but, as Dick continued his motions, they presently met with a response.

Several Indians cautiously arose to their feet, making responsive gestures. Then they started to advance toward the spot where the three pale-faces stood.

"Why," exploded Roger, "look at every bush giving up a brave! There must be twenty of them, all told. How lucky for us they are Sioux, and not Blackfeet, the allies of Lascelles."

From every quarter the Indians now advanced, forming a complete cordon around Dick and his friends, who awaited their coming calmly, confident as to the result of the meeting.

"Dick," said Roger, "I am sure I know that man in the lead, with the feathers of a chief in his long black hair, and the bears' claws around his neck."

"Yes," the other remarked, "I was just going to say the same thing. He is a sub-chief by the name of Beaver Tail. Surely he should remember us, and what we did to make his chief our friend."

"Will he remember us, do you think?" continued Roger, apprehensively.

"Have no fear," Dick assured him; "all will

be well. An Indian, once a friend, can be depended on forever. I am only too glad now I held my fire."

As the first of the Indians came up, the boys waited anxiously to see whether they would be recognized by the sub-chief. To their satisfaction Beaver Tail immediately greeted them as friends, after the manner of his tribe.

Others of the warriors must also have discovered that they had seen two of the palefaces among the lodges in their home village, for there were numerous grunts and friendly nods among them.

"How can we let Beaver Tail know what we are here for, and beg him to help us save Williams from the Frenchmen?" Dick now asked. "The chances are that not one of the braves or the chief himself can speak a word of English. Shall we make signs in the snow, and tell him that way?"

"Leave it to me, lad," Mayhew told him. "I have a little smattering of the Sioux tongue, for once upon a time I was a prisoner among their wigwams for months. With the aid of signs I shall be able to tell him the story of how we seek Williams, the man who was in your company at the time their chief set you free.

And they will, I feel sure, help us carry out our plan.”

Both the pioneer boys watched Mayhew with intense eagerness as he faced Beaver Tail and commenced to speak to him in his own language. The chief looked astonished and pleased as well, for he had never dreamed that a paleface could talk in the Dacotah tongue. (Note 10.)

While Mayhew was talking Dick watched the face of Beaver Tail. He could see that by degrees the chief was catching the drift of what the guide tried to explain. Of course this consisted in the main of their desire to overtake Williams, who had set off on a hunting trip, and more to the effect of how he had been unlucky enough to fall into the hands of the Blackfeet, who were acting in conjunction with certain French traders.

It was a clever idea on the part of the guide to bring in the Blackfeet, because, as he very well knew, there was never-ending war between that tribe and the Sioux. This would make Beaver Tail all the more willing, even eager, to lend his aid in effecting the rescue of Williams.

Step by step Mayhew advanced. When his limited stock of words failed him, the guide resorted to crude drawings on the snow, at which

device he seemed to be quite adept, if the boys could judge from the chorus of "how-how" that broke from the crowd of braves after each effort in this line, and which they judged meant appreciation on the part of the interested onlookers.

Finally the guide had reached the conclusion. He must have asked Beaver Tail to help the paleface friends of the great chief, Running Elk, to rescue their companion from the hated enemy, because the Indian was nodding his head as though the proposition struck him favorably.

Then he commenced talking in return. When he saw from the puzzled expression on the face of Mayhew that the frontiersman failed to catch the idea he was trying to express, the chief turned to the sign language, upon which his race have always relied when communicating with each other, or to commemorate great events such as glorious victories.

"What does he say, Mayhew?" asked Roger.

"He knows where the Frenchmen have their camp, and it is, as we believed, over on the big water," replied the guide.

"Good! And will he take us there, and help us rescue Jasper?" continued Roger.

"He says he will," Mayhew announced, with

a happy smile on his weatherbeaten face, for things had taken a decided turn in their favor, and he began to imagine himself back in the main camp, ready to make another attempt at taking that message down to the mouth of the Missouri River.

“When?” continued the impatient Roger.

“We can be heading over that way as soon as we feel like it,” the guide explained. “The lake is about seven miles from here, as near as I can make him out from his sign drawing. Once we get close by we must wait for night to come. It is against Injun nature to ever make an attack in broad daylight, when it can be avoided.”

“So long as they do not injure Jasper it will not matter much,” Roger admitted.

“If they have not hurt him up to now I do not think anything is going to happen before night comes around,” Dick told him.

As there was nothing more to be arranged Mayhew managed to tell the chief that they gladly accepted his offer of assistance, and placed themselves wholly in his hands. Perhaps the artful frontiersman, knowing the nature of all Indians, managed to convey more or less flattery in his speech. At any rate Beaver Tail

gave evidences of being greatly pleased by it, and even went around shaking hands with the three palefaces, in the same way he had seen the head chief, Running Elk, do on a former occasion.

It was a fortunate thing for the exploring expedition that members of their party had been able to make friends with this tribe of the powerful Sioux nation so early in their invasion of the hunting grounds of these Western Indians.

Dick and Roger had shot a savage panther that was about to leap from the limb of a tree upon an old Indian squaw and a little girl. Later on, when the boys found themselves prisoners of the Sioux, this squaw, who turned out to be a sister of the great chief, Running Elk, and the child Dove Eye his own daughter, saved their lives; and from that time on the Sioux, at least that particular tribe, were on friendly terms with the explorers.

Accompanied by that host of fighting warriors, Dick and his party pushed on into the east for several hours, not trying to make any fast time, however, since they were in no particular hurry to arrive before evening.

“If you have been taking notice of the fact,

Dick," Mayhew remarked, as he drew alongside the others, "we have our backs full on the westering sun."

"Yes," Dick returned, "I did take note of that, and it tells us you were right; the lake, and the camp of the Frenchmen as well, lie straight to the east."

"Look up, Roger; what do you see?" demanded the guide.

"Our old friends, the crows, flying in flocks, all in a straight line, and heading into the sun. Listen to them cawing; but somehow or other the sound doesn't 'rile' me as it did before. In fact, I rather like to hear it, because I can fancy they are saying: 'You are on the right track, the camp is only a little way ahead, and good luck to you!' "

Dick laughed softly.

"That is only because you are happy now, while before you had a heavy load on your mind. As none of us can understand crow talk we must let it go by. See how they rise in the air when they glimpse us. Wary old rascals that they are, they scent danger a mile off."

"And, as we must be getting near the big water now," interposed Mayhew, "it may be just as well that we forego talking except in

whispers. There can be no telling about those crafty Blackfeet; some of them may be roving around, on the lookout for meat, and spy us. Leave it all to the chief, and let us copy everything they do, so as to show Beaver Tail we have handed the whole job over to him."

After that not a word passed between the three comrades above their breath, as they moved along in company with the dusky crew.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE CAMP ON THE BIG WATER

“THERE is the big water, Dick!” said Roger, in the ear of his cousin, as he chanced to peer through a narrow opening in the dense woods beyond.

“And the chief has called a halt, which looks as though we were not to go any further just now,” Dick added.

They could catch a glimpse of what looked like an inland sea. The wind was raising white-caps on the tops of the waves, as they rolled past toward the south. As far as the eye could reach the same broad expanse of clear crystal water lay. The Indians did well to call it the “big water,” though to-day it is marked on the map as Yellowstone Lake.

A spy was sent out while the remainder of the party remained in hiding. This was about an hour from sundown. He came back as the last glow was fading in the western sky, and there was a consultation between the chief and his leading warriors.

“Try to find out how the land lies, and what the plan of campaign will be,” Dick told Mayhew.

The guide returned presently with all the information they required.

“As near as I can tell,” he explained to the boys, “the spy brings in the news that the Blackfeet have mostly departed, and only the four Frenchmen are left in the camp.”

“But I hope they have left Jasper behind also,” exclaimed Roger, taking fresh alarm. “You remember we were told by Lascelles that he meant to try to get the Indians to carry him far away to their village, and either adopt him into the tribe, or else burn him at the stake.”

“Make your mind easy on that score,” Mayhew assured him.

“Then he is still in the camp?” asked the boy.

“Yes, the spy saw him there, tied to a tree,” Mayhew continued. “One of the Frenchmen gave him a kick in passing, like the coward that he is. I used to believe the French were gentlemen, but my opinion has changed.”

“Oh! you must not judge all Frenchmen by these rascals,” said Dick. “They are of the bad kind. Perhaps Jasper will be glad of a

chance to return that kick with interest before sun-up."

"And if he doesn't, I will!" asserted Roger, impulsively, for he hated a coward and a bully above all things.

"What does Beaver Tail mean to do?" Dick asked.

"I think his first act will be to send the spy back again, so as to keep track of what is going on in the French camp," Mayhew told him. "Then at a later hour all of us will creep over and surround the place. Any Blackfeet who may be found are apt to be given a short shrift, because they are the mortal foes of the Sioux; but I do not believe the traders will be harmed, unless they should be unwise enough to shoot one of Beaver Tail's warriors."

Shortly afterwards Dick saw the same skillful scout go forth, and he knew that Mayhew had guessed the truth when he said a close watch was to be kept over the camp on the lake shore.

In good time the signal would be given for the general advance. Until then, all of them must possess their souls in patience. As the cold of the night increased it was likely to prove no laughing matter, since they were unprovided with blankets, and dared not build a fire. Still,

with success so close to their hands, the pioneer boys felt that they could put up with almost anything.

How slowly the time passed, in spite of all these brave resolutions! Roger found it necessary several times to get up and, as noiselessly as possible, thresh his arms around him, so as to start his stagnant blood into renewed circulation. Had it not been for this expedient he believed he would be unable to respond when finally the signal was given to move on.

When it appeared to Roger that many hours must have passed, he was elated to discover that the chief, Beaver Tail, had begun to show signs of life. He had been sitting like a block of stone, simply casting a look up at the stars occasionally, as though one of the heavenly bodies must reach a certain altitude before the time could be reckoned as up.

This must have been a signal to the others, for immediately each warrior was on his moccasined feet, and on every side bows could be seen being strung in readiness for twanging, while quivers of arrows were fastened over the left shoulder of each soft-footed brave.

Once the expedition was in motion, the chill soon left Roger's body. In its place he exper-

ienced a gratifying warmth that must have started through the increased pumping of his youthful heart due to excitement.

The boys found as they advanced that the crafty Sioux chief had made as complete arrangements as any war captain could have done. He had divided his force into three sections of about equal numbers. One of these was sent ahead, and it was easy to surmise that the duty of these warriors was to proceed to the further extremity of the Frenchmen's camp, so as to cut off escape from that quarter.

A second lot could come up from the rear, while those with whom the palefaces and Beaver Tail himself were associated advanced along the shore of the lake, and expected to reach the vicinity of the camp in that way.

The boys had never gazed upon a body of water anything like the size of that lake, though accustomed to the big Missouri River in flood-time, when it was miles from shore to shore. Once they had cruised down to the Mississippi in company with Roger's father, Sandy Armstrong, who had built a big canoe and wanted to revisit the place where, as a lad, he had had a temporary home.

Seen in the sheen of the starlight, the lake

looked as though it might be an ocean in itself, for no further shore was visible. Roger wondered if this was what the sea resembled, and if he and Dick would really be permitted to continue on with the explorers, cross the rocky range of mountains, and finally bring up on the golden strand of the Pacific Ocean.

But there was a glimmering light close by, which he surmised was a smoldering fire in the French traders' camp. Carefully they continued to creep forward. It gave Roger a thrill to realize that he was in the company of savages such as his father and grandfather had fought in the years gone by; but who were now their best of friends. What wonderful stories he and Dick would have to tell should they live through all these manifold perils to return safely home, and resume their old places at the domestic fireside.

Both boys were secretly hoping that Lascelles and his compatriots would not be so foolhardy as to attempt to resist. Bad as these men were, the boys did not wish to see them butchered, as they undoubtedly would be should they fire on the Sioux, or even wound one of Beaver Tail's warriors.

As for any stray Blackfeet who may have re-

mained in camp while the main body was off somewhere, if they got in the way of the Sioux arrows or tomahawks that was their lookout; the boys could not be expected to include them in the scheme of general amnesty.

The attack was not to be started until certain signals announced that all the detachments had reached the positions assigned to them by the chief. When he heard the howl of a wolf given with a certain little twist at the finish, and then also caught the cry of the screech-owl, he would feel assured that nothing remained to be done but order a concerted assault.

Indians have always had a certain set plan for their surprises. No matter how slyly they crept up on blockhouse or camp or border fort, when a certain time arrived they felt it was absolutely necessary to break out in ferocious yells. No doubt this was done partly to give freedom to their pent-up feelings, and, at the same time, add to the alarm of those whom they were attacking.

Dick and Roger knew this fact. They had had some little experience themselves in connection with Indians. Besides this, they had heard innumerable stories from Grandfather David concerning those days along the Ohio, when the

tribes from the Great Lakes to the southern border of Kentucky were all on the warpath, and seeking day and night to destroy the hardy pioneers.

This being the case, neither of the lads felt any surprise when there arose a series of the most dreadful yells. The warriors whom they accompanied added to the din with all their might, at the same time springing forward and running in the direction of the near by camp.

From every quarter arose that deafening clamor. It must have struck terror to the hearts of the Frenchmen, even though they may have fancied that they were friendly with all the tribes of the far Northwest, because of their dealings in the matter of buying the stores of pelts collected by the red men.

There was nothing for the boys to do but keep company with the braves as they thus closed in on the surrounded camp. Already they could see signs of tremendous excitement in that quarter, as the inmates, alarmed by the clamor of many tongues, turned this way and that, hardly knowing whether to run, or else raise up their hands in token of submission.

Several dusky figures were discovered by the light of the fire darting into the thickets close to

the camp. These must be the few Blackfoot braves who, for some reason, had been left behind. They knew there would be no mercy for them at the hands of their mortal foes, the Sioux, and on that account they preferred taking their chances in the brush and half-darkness.

Had it not been for that horrid din, perhaps the boys might have caught the sharp twang of bowstrings; they might also have heard the death cries of those who met the flight of those swiftly-driven arrows, with their tips of jagged flint.

Just then it mattered nothing to Dick and Roger whether any of the Blackfeet managed to run the gauntlet and escape or not; their thoughts were all taken up with the hope and expectation of finding that one for whom they had long sought, Jasper Williams, whose signature at the bottom of a new document would mean so much to the folks at home.

As they entered the camp they saw a cluster of figures standing with fear-blanchèd faces. The flickering firelight showed the boys that Lascelles was there, and the smooth-faced young man, cowering at his side, must be his son, Alexis, whom accounts reported as being as

great a rascal as his father. Besides, there were two more of the traders.

At sight of the boys whom he had so greatly wronged Lascelles cried out something. Neither of them could exactly understand its nature; but Dick fancied the cowardly Frenchman must be pleading with them to have his life spared.

“Hold up your hands, and they may not harm you; but under no conditions try to run away or you are dead men!” was what he flung out at them as he ran past.

Roger was at his heels. The guide, with wonderful good sense, gave the fire a little kick in passing, which had the effect of starting up quite a bright blaze. By the aid of this light they could see what was going on.

Already a number of the Sioux had entered the camp. Their appearance, with flourishing hatchets and knives, doubtless chilled the blood of the Frenchmen, knowing as they now did that these braves of Running Elk must be on the most friendly terms with Dick and Roger Armstrong.

Dick looked further. It was, however, the keen-eyed Roger who chanced to be the first to discover what they were searching for.

“This way, Dick; here he is, tied to this tree!” he cried.

As Dick leaped after him he saw that there was indeed some one bound fast to a tree, a white man at that; and the firelight disclosed the fact that it was Jasper Williams.

CHAPTER XXXII

A WELL WON VICTORY—CONCLUSION

THE astonishment of Jasper Williams was apparent as he saw Dick and Roger Armstrong before him. Up to that time he had supposed the attack to be simply one of those ordinary Indian surprises to be expected when white men are hunting on ground that the tribes of the Northwest claimed as their own territory.

“Saving me seems to be getting quite a habit with you lads,” he told them, as his bonds were hurriedly severed, and he could grasp a hand of each. “How did the news reach camp; and what made the captain allow you to start out almost alone into this heathen land in order to rescue me?”

Dick quickly informed him concerning the reason for their presence.

“We did not dream that you were in trouble,” he said. “Mayhew, who was taking the document to our people down on the Missouri, was robbed of the paper. He came back to the camp

to let us know; and we could see the fine hand of that French trader over there back of it."

"François Lascelles!" cried the hunter, as a look of understanding crossed his rugged features. "Now I begin to see what it all means. He was afraid you would get another signature from me, and to block the game he had me taken prisoner by the Blackfeet. Why," he added, in a burst of anger, "they even threatened to carry me off to their village and make me teach their squaws how white women sew and bake bread, and all such civilized ways!"

"We immediately started out to overtake you," continued Dick, "and Mayhew insisted on being one of our party. What strange adventures we have met with you shall hear about another time; for I take it that you do not mean after this to head any further into such a terrible country?"

Williams shrugged his broad shoulders, and made a wry face.

"I suppose, lads, I would be a fool to try it, since my comrades deserted me," he told them.

"Yes," replied Roger, "we met them on the way, and both Hardy and Mordaunt vowed nothing could tempt them to go a step further. What with the working of the Evil Spirit, and

the danger from hostile reds, they had had enough."

"We are glad to hear you say such a sensible thing," Dick added, "because this does not seem like a white man's country. Only for our good luck in meeting these friendly Sioux, who come from the village of Running Elk, we might have had a much harder time in getting you free. But it is all right now!"

"The sooner we start back to the camp the better I will be pleased," Williams admitted. "Then there's that document we ought to have on its way. What will you do with the Frenchmen?"

"If we let them go free now," affirmed Roger, "no matter how they give us their solemn word of honor, I believe Lascelles would try to intercept our messenger again."

"You are right about that, son," said Williams, warmly. "Better let the Indians knock them on the head, and have done with it. They surely deserve little mercy at your hands."

Dick, however, could not agree to such a thing.

"No," he said, firmly, "if Beaver Tail will agree to take them to camp with us, I believe Captain Lewis will hold them as hostages until Mayhew has had time to get so far along on

his journey east that he can not be headed again. After that the Frenchmen might be turned loose."

Between Williams and Mayhew this was explained to Beaver Tail, who agreed. Nothing was said about a reward, but Dick had already made up his mind that he would endeavor to induce the two captains in charge of the exploring party to deal generously with the Sioux in this respect.

"It will not be thrown away, either," he told Williams, "because to have Running Elk and his tribe friendly with us might mean much for the success of our trip when spring comes."

Naturally Lascelles and his comrades were very much concerned as to what their fate was going to be. When they heard what Dick had to say they seemed rather pleased, though the old trader frowned, and muttered to himself from time to time, as though he did not like the idea of being frustrated in his cherished scheme.

There was apparently no help for it, unless he wished to try to escape, when the chances were he would be quickly hunted down and lose his scalp to the Sioux.

Accordingly a start was made for the camp, the entire band of Indians accompanying the

boys and the Frenchmen. During that weary march the old trader was given an opportunity of learning about the character of the two lads whom he had been pursuing so heartlessly, with the intention of robbing their parents of the property that he claimed through a flaw in the title.

Whether this knowledge did him any good or not it would be impossible to say. He was too old to change his ways of life, and, while openly protesting to have seen a light, so that he would no longer try to injure the Armstrongs, Dick and Roger put little faith in his repentance.

When finally the camp was reached the prisoners were handed over to the care of some of the soldiers accompanying the expedition, who were charged with the task of seeing that none of them escaped.

Jasper Williams readily signed another document which Captain Lewis himself arranged, and both the leaders of the expedition put their names down as witnesses. Then Mayhew started once more for the lower Missouri. The other two messengers had agreed to wait at a certain place for him to join them; and he believed he still had ample time to arrive before the specified time would be up.

When the two boys waved him farewell they felt that a great load had been taken from their shoulders.

“This time there should be nothing to prevent him from reaching our homes and delivering the precious paper, besides our letters,” said Dick.

“Something seems to tell me he will do it,” added Roger, “and so I have decided not to let it worry me any longer. We will keep Lascelles and his son here for some weeks, so that they will be powerless to catch up with Mayhew, even if they wished to try it. And Beaver Tail seemed greatly pleased with the generous way Captain Lewis treated him, too, so we have made good friends of the Sioux.”

“He gave the chief a gun and some ammunition,” remarked Dick. “He was as pleased with it as a child would be with a new toy. And every brave also received something to show that we wanted them to be our friends. But the dinner we gave them did not seem to reach the right spot. I saw more than one slyly throw the tea away when they thought no one was looking.”

“They will stick to roast dog as a feast dish,” laughed Roger. “I was afraid at one time there

might be trouble between the Mandans and the Sioux, for they are old rivals of the chase and the warpath. But Captain Lewis managed to patch up a truce that may last while we are here, at any rate, even if the old warfare breaks out again afterwards."

"It took a good deal of talk, though," suggested Roger, "to induce the Mandans to hide those old Sioux scalps they had swinging about their teepees. If the braves of Running Elk had glimpsed those nothing could have kept them from making trouble. But it is simply wonderful what power Captain Lewis has over men."

"If we ever do set eyes on the great ocean that lies far beyond the range of rocky mountains," Dick affirmed, "it will be owing mostly to the cleverness of the President's private secretary."

History has recorded the facts, and the young pioneer in stating his opinion was only saying what other men have conceded.

A few days after Mayhew left the camp, well provisioned and armed for his dangerous trip over the back trail, winter set in in earnest. The boys were well satisfied to be so comfortably housed and among friends, instead of wandering amidst those strange scenes of which

they never seemed to tire of talking, where the earth appeared to be on fire deep down under the outer crust, and continually spouted those colossal streams of steaming water.

The four Frenchmen were kept prisoners until several weeks had elapsed, and then allowed to go. They had a *cache* somewhere, they admitted, with an abundance of ammunition as well as other supplies, so there was little fear of their perishing in the severity of the winter weather.

As the days and weeks drifted along Dick and Roger carried out many of their little plans. They hunted when the weather admitted, and accompanied Jasper Williams on trapping jaunts that covered several days. They also had intercourse with the peculiar Mandan Indians, and learned a multitude of interesting things connected with the tribe called the "White Indians," a race which has always been a mystery to historians.

As the long winter drew near a close the boys began to feel their pulses thrill in anticipation of being once more on the move with their faces turned toward the magical setting sun.

The talk around the fires was all of the wonders that still awaited them beyond the chain

of mountains of which they heard so much. Every scrap of information was garnered and repeated. Captain Lewis lost no opportunity to learn new facts, or rumors concerning what they might expect to meet in their further advance into the country which up to then had never known the impression of a white man's foot.

It can be easily understood, then, that as the snows began to melt with the gradual increase of the sun's warmth in the early spring, preparations were feverishly undertaken for a start. And in that camp there was none more deeply interested in the final outcome than were our two pioneer boys.

"I think we'll see some wonderful sights," said Roger.

"Perhaps," was the answer Dick made.

How the forward march into the Great Unknown was resumed, and what adventures fell to the lot of our young heroes, will be related in the next volume of this series, to be called "The Pioneer Boys of the Columbia"; but, come what may, it is not likely that they will witness anything more wonderful than the marvels they encountered in the territory of the Yellowstone.

NOTES

NOTE 1 (PAGE 7)

When, in 1803, the new Republic purchased from France for fifteen million dollars what was then known as the territory of Louisiana, the United States extended its boundaries toward the unknown West where it was believed a mighty range of mountains divided the continent, while far beyond lay the Pacific Ocean. The territory included practically what is now covered by the States of Montana, North and South Dakota, Nebraska, Minnesota, Iowa, Kansas, Arkansas, Louisiana, Indian Territory, and part of Colorado.

President Jefferson wished to aid the settlers along the Mississippi, who wanted more room for expansion toward the setting sun, and accordingly, on his recommendation, Congress authorized the sending of an exploring expedition to ascertain what lay beyond the limits of the new land, and, if possible, to go all the way to the ocean.

Captain Meriwether Lewis, the President's private secretary, together with Captain William Clark, was placed in charge of the expedition, which started from St. Louis early in 1804. It consisted of nine young Kentuckians, fourteen United States soldiers, two French voyageurs to serve as interpreters among the Indians whom they expected to encounter, and a black servant for Captain Clark. Some frontiersmen also

joined them before they left the last trading post. On May 24th this little expedition left the mouth of the Missouri, and plunged into the then unknown wilderness, not knowing whether a single soul of the party would ever live to come back again with a record of the wonders they had seen, and the perils they had encountered.

History tells us that they wintered at the Mandan village near the headwaters of the Missouri and that strange river which the Indians called Yellowstone, on account of the predominating color along its banks. The following spring the Lewis and Clark expedition continued on its way, reaching the Columbia River, and following it down until, at its mouth, they beheld the goal of all their hopes, the glorious ocean that lay bathed in the glow of the setting sun.

NOTE 2 (PAGE 26)

In those days, when the Indians of the Northwest did not have the Great White Father at Washington to supply them with rations and fresh beef, it was customary for the various tribes to participate in annual fall hunts, so that sufficient meat might be procured to last them through the long, cold winters.

Sometimes they went after buffalo, which at that day were to be found in immense herds, and often the most wanton destruction was indulged in, traps being laid whereby the great animals were driven by hundreds over some precipice, so that the Indians hardly bothered taking anything but the tongues of their victims, which they cured by drying in the smoke of their fires. In spite of this slaughter the herds continued to increase until modern man, with his repeat-

ing rifle, made his appearance, at the time the first railroad was being built across the continent, when they quickly reached the point of practical extermination.

More often the meat obtained in these fall hunts was venison. This the Indians cured by drying in the sun. Thus prepared, it would keep for any length of time, if not allowed to get wet. It is not the nicest food an epicure might select, being dark-looking, and often as hard as flint; but pemmican, as this dried venison is called, can be made into a palatable dish when properly cooked.

When an Indian was sent on a trip of perhaps two hundred miles, to take a message to another tribe, he would simply carry along with him in his pouch a handful of this pemmican, which would serve him as a means of sustenance throughout his long journey, washed down with an occasional drink from some spring that he would discover on the trail.

NOTE 3 (PAGE 128)

Probably the giant geyser which performed such a splendid service for our two young heroes was the one known for many years as Old Faithful, from the fact that, while other geysers in Yellowstone Park may seem grander on occasion, they are often erratic in their flow, and not to be depended on. Old Faithful has often been described, and is an object of such general interest among the visitors to the National Park that a large hotel has been built so close that one can sit in an easy-chair within a few hundred yards, and view its spectacular upheaval.

It seems to come every sixty-five minutes, to a dot,

and the great white column rises with a roar from one to two hundred feet into the air, continuing for possibly the space of five minutes. New beauties are to be discovered with almost every eruption, according to the weather, and the hour of the day or night. Sunrise, sunset, moonlight sway the great steaming column into a thousand fantastic forms. When the geyser is quiet one may approach the crater, an oblong opening about two by six feet, with a quiet pool of crystal water.

Some say the deposits around the crater indicate an age of tens, if not hundreds of thousands of years. When Columbus discovered America this great column played at regular intervals in the primal solitude; when Lief Erickson landed it was unspeakably old, but glorious as ever; when Christ was on earth its strange beauty fell on the eye of the infrequent savage who gazed on it with superstitious awe; long before the reputed date of creation it played and coruscated in the sunlight.

No wonder, then, that those, who stop to think, gaze with wonder on Old Faithful and that the Indians, at the time the Lewis and Clark expedition crossed the continent, held it in awe and reverence.

NOTE 4 (PAGE 162)

The grizzly bear has never been found east of a certain line marked by spurs of the mighty Rocky Mountains. At the time the Lewis and Clark expedition penetrated the wilderness lying between the settlements along the lower Missouri and the far distant Coast Range of mountains, in what is now known as California, very little was known of this most

terrible of all the wild animals native to North America; indeed, some big game hunters put the grizzly ahead of the African lion or the tiger of the Indian jungle so far as ferocity and toughness goes.

Vague stories drifted to the ears of white hunters about a monster bear which terrified the red men of the West. They had even seen the claws strung around the neck of some chief who had won his high position after having killed one of these fearful creatures in a hand-to-hand fight.

When the explorers finally returned to civilization they brought with them the most amazing stories of things they had seen; but undoubtedly nothing surpassed their descriptions of the grizzly bear's ten lives, and the fearful strength which the animal possessed.

In these modern days of soft-nosed bullets, and the exploding kind that do such fearful execution upon striking the game, it may not be so difficult to bring down old "Eph," as Western men call the grizzly; but a score or more of years ago men declared that they had known such an animal to be hit with twenty shots, and yet seem to mind his wounds no more than if they were flea-bites.

It can be seen, then, that, in slaying a grizzly, Dick and his cousin Roger were really accomplishing what in those days was a stupendous feat. Their success must be laid partly to good luck, and the fact that they were able to send their lead to a vital spot. Ordinary wounds will have little or no effect upon a tough grizzly, save to further enrage the beast, and make him more fierce than ever.

Unless they are heavily armed, or can gain the shelter of a convenient tree, wise hunters usually let such a dangerous animal severely alone when coming

unexpectedly upon him in the rocky canyons where he loves to prowl.

NOTE 5 (PAGE 181)

The first real intimation the world received concerning the wonders of what is now Yellowstone Park can be said to have come through the experiences of a trapper by the name of Colter. He was made prisoner by the hostile Blackfeet in the early part of the nineteenth century, and, after being tortured by them, managed to escape. When he afterwards reached civilization he had some marvelous tales to tell about a land of steaming pools; of springs of boiling water, that at intervals shot hundreds of feet into the air; of seething cauldrons of pitch; of strange lakes and rivers; as well as of rocks and clay that bore the diversified colors of the rainbow. Of course, his rough friends laughed at his stories, and gave them little credence. Indeed, it was believed that the sufferings of the trapper had made him somewhat light in the head. They treated his accounts with derision, and classed the tales with those of Gulliver and Munchausen. But, in later years, everything Colter had told was amply verified, showing that he had actually been in the region now known as Yellowstone Park.

It was not until 1869 that a well-equipped prospecting party was sent out by private enterprise to ascertain the truth about this supposedly mythical region of awe-inspiring wonders. Thirty-six days were spent on the trip, and the party saw such amazing things that, as the account tells us, some of them "were unwilling on their return to risk their reputation for veracity by relating the wonders of that unequalled country."

To-day, the tourist is taken into the Park and shown everything that is worth seeing with the least degree of discomfort. And there is nothing in the Old World that can at all compare with the natural wonders to be found on the great Government Reservation, the lake itself being the gem of them all, for it covers something like one hundred and fifty square miles, and is as clear as crystal.

NOTE 6 (PAGE 191)

As a rule the Indians of the Great Northwest seemed to avoid the region now known as Yellowstone Park, even though it abounded in game, because of superstitious fears connected with the mysterious working of the spouting geysers, which they believed to be the evidence of the Evil One opposed to the Good Manitou. Occasionally the Blackfeet or the Crows invaded the borders when in need of fresh meat. Some lodges of a fragment of the Snake Indians have been found, a miserable tribe known as Sheep-eaters; but the powerful Sioux, the Mandans, and the Nez Perces tribes avoided the district as though it were truly accursed.

The most important Indian trail in the Park was that known as the Great Bannock Trail. It extended from Henry Lake across the Gallatin Range to Mammoth Hot Springs, where it was joined by another coming up the valley of the Gardiner. Thence it led across the Black-tail Deer plateau to the ford above Tower Falls; thence up the Lamar Valley, forking at Soda Butte, and reaching the Bighorn Valley by way of Clark's Falls and the Stinking-water River. The trail was certainly a very ancient and much traveled one. It had become a deep furrow in the grassy

slopes, and is still distinctly visible in places, though unused for a quarter of a century.

Arrows and spear heads have been discovered in considerable numbers. Some of the early explorers also found more recent and perishable evidence of the presence of Indians in the Park in the shape of rude wick-e-ups, brush enclosures, and similar contrivances of the Sheep-killers.

NOTE 7 (PAGE 196)

Of all the tribes west of the Mississippi, even including the warlike Sioux, none gave the venturesome paleface adventurers who wandered into that country more trouble than the Blackfoot Indians. Like the Flatheads, and some other tribes, they had their main villages far up amidst the pine-clad mountains where enemies could hardly reach them without long and dangerous journeys. From these eyries they were accustomed to sally forth, either on some grand hunt for a winter's supply of meat, or else to strike a sudden blow at some tribe with which they were at war.

When game grew scarce in their customary hunting grounds, some of these bold braves were in the habit of taking longer hunts, and had frequently approached the border of the Land of Wonders. As a rule they avoided the country of the spouting geysers, because they believed an Evil Spirit dwelt there.

The habits of these Indians differed from those of the Mandans, because they were by nature of a much wilder disposition, utterly untamable. To this day the remnants of the old Blackfoot tribe are not to be compared with other civilized aborigines who have taken to the plow and the cottage. The Mandans

themselves suffered so severely from smallpox, introduced into the tribe through connection with the whites, that long years ago they became extinct.

NOTE 8 (PAGE 221)

The usual medicine man of all the Indian tribes of North America in the days of the pioneers was as big a humbug as could be imagined. He usually held his position through craftiness, and the ability to make the tribe believe that he was in direct communication with the Great Spirit or Manitou. It was therefore a matter of some moment for the native doctor to "make good" when he had promised that victory would crown the efforts of the warriors going forth to battle, or otherwise his life might pay the penalty.

When it came to treating disease he seldom gave even the commonest herbs, rather trusting to incantations in order to frighten off the evil thing that had fastened on the sick person. Thus tomtoms were beaten, chants given, and the medicine man himself would perform a weird dance around the sick one, making music to accompany his gesticulations by rattling gourds in which stones had been slipped, jingling the metal ornaments on his apparel, and in every imaginable way trying to "conjure" the maker of the spell that had been laid upon the afflicted one.

Sometimes the invalid got well in spite of everything, and great was the jubilation of the tribe; on the other hand if death came and took a victim it was easy for the medicine man to find some excuse.

Perhaps the Blackfoot chief, Black Otter, may have seen white doctors cure their patients by giving them medicine; or else learned of it through intercourse

with French traders, such as Lascelles. However that might be, it was not so very singular for some of his braves to have become afflicted with the same desire to be treated by a paleface medicine man. This, then, would account for the eagerness with which those who had received wounds in the affray between the Blackfeet and the invaders of the Enchanted Land agreed to let young Dick Armstrong attend to their hurts. Deep down in their hearts they must have realized that the way of the palefaces was much superior to the crude methods in vogue with their native medicine man.

NOTE 9 (PAGE 246)

This incident of an Indian's gratitude is not of an unusual character. The history of early pioneer days shows many such. The red men were savage and cruel fighters, crafty, and not to be trusted in many ways; but they possessed several noble characteristics that will always stand out boldly when the good and bad are contrasted.

Many instances are on record which prove that the Indian could be grateful for benefits bestowed, though he might sooner choose to die than ask a favor.

The brave whose wounded shoulder Dick had so skillfully treated evidently saw no reason why he should call out and alarm the camp when he discovered the paleface boys escaping. He probably had no special liking for the French trader, and it was Lascelles who seemed to be most concerned in the keeping of the two white lads. Perhaps, even, he had some reason to dislike the trader; or he may have felt, deep down in his heart, a secret admiration for the boys who could thus hoodwink a dozen Blackfoot braves.

NOTE 10 (PAGE 308)

The Sioux proper, known among themselves and by other Indian tribes as Dacotahs, were originally one of the most extensively diffused nations of the Great West. From the Upper Mississippi, where they mingled with the northern race of Chippewas, to the Missouri, and far in the Northwest toward the country of the Blackfeet, the tribes of this family occupied the boundless prairie.

It was in the country of the Sioux, on a high ridge separating the head-waters of the St. Peter's from the Missouri, that the far-famed quarry of red pipe-stone lay. It was originally deemed a neutral ground where hostile tribes from far and near might resort to secure a supply of this all-essential want of the Indian, for all their pipes were made of this peculiar hard clay.

To use the stone for any other purposes was to the Indians an act of sacrilege. They looked upon it as priceless *medicine*. At a meeting of chiefs which Mr. Catlin, the historical writer, attended near this quarry many years ago he heard some remarkable expressions used. "You see," said one chief, holding a pipe close to his arm, "this pipe is part of our own flesh." Another said: "If the white man takes away a piece of the red pipestone, it is a hole in our flesh, and the blood will always run." A third expressed his feelings in a still more remarkable way: "We love to go to the Pipe-Stone, and get a piece for our pipes; but we ask the Great Spirit first. If the white men go to it they will take it out, and not fill up the holes again and the Great Spirit will be offended."

Besides the Sioux there were to be found at times

in this region the Flatheads, the Ojibbeways, the Assinaboias, the Crows, the Blackfeet, and several lesser tribes. Among them there was almost constant warfare. While the Blackfeet and others had plenty of game in their own lands, they were now and then seized with a desire to dare the anger of the Sioux and hunt the buffalo over the territory claimed as their preserves by the latter. And many fierce battles took place because of this belligerency.

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